

THE EXPERIENCE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN A PUBLIC ORGANISATION

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REMARKS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The references as well as the editorial style as prescribed by the *Publication Manual (5th edition)* of the American Psychological Association (APA) were followed in this dissertation. This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) to use APA style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The dissertation is submitted in the form of one research article. The name of the study leader appears on the research article as it will be submitted for publication in a national journal.

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SUMMARY

Topic: The experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.

Key terms: Affirmative Action, Employment Equity, Discrimination, Job Satisfaction, Public Sector, Private Sector.

South Africa is experiencing a process of formidable and fundamental change. Public administrators as well as politicians are under tremendous pressure as heavy demands are being placed on them. These demands include coping with interventions such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity, and the importance of managing diversity in the workplace. Despite improvements in race relations in the past twenty years, dysfunctional and ineffective behaviour still occur. This may be a reflection of the discomfort and anxiety experienced by employees in the work setting. In order to comply with legislation, organisations created opportunities for Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people. This, in return, leads to perceptions of preferential hiring. The view that Affirmative Action involves preferential hiring and treatment based on group membership creates resistance to its implementation and original purpose. The reason for this resistance might be linked to the fact that people still perceive discrimination and injustice in the workplace. These perceptions seem true in public organisations even though public organisations have taken a positive stance with regard to implementing Equal Employment and Affirmative Action plans.

A qualitative design with an availability sample ($N = 20$) of employees working in a public organisation was used. The qualitative research makes it possible to determine the subjective experience of employees in a public organisation. Semi-structured interviews based on the phenomenological method were conducted with employees working in different sections and different positions in a public organisation. Non-directive questions were asked during the interview. The tape-recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim in order to analyse the information. Content analysis was used to analyse and interpret the research data in a systematic, objective and quantitative way. A literature-control has been done to investigate relevant research in order to determine the comparativeness and uniqueness of the current research.

Results indicated that Affirmative Action has been used as a tool in achieving its goal by focusing on preferential hiring. From the responses it was clear that the majority of the participants are of opinion that preferential hiring led to the appointment of incompetent candidates. It appears from the interviews that appointments are made without basing it on merit. This is against the basic principle of the public organisation of hiring and promoting employees by set standards. Due to the fact that previous disadvantaged groups are being placed in positions of which they have no experience or are not trained in, job related knowledge seems to present a problem. From the interviews it appeared that employees felt that poor customer service increased across the organisation due to the appointment of incompetent candidates. This also seems to have an effect on the workload being handled.

It seems that predominantly white employees tend to be ambivalent towards Affirmative Action. Part of the reason for this ambivalence is the fear of change, especially when that change involves a radical re-thinking of past strategies. White employees, employed by the old apartheid system, feel alienated and/or marginalised in the new Affirmative Action process. White employees are also leaving organisations because they seem not to be part of the Affirmative Action process. This leads to loss of expertise occurring in organisations. Though organisations show a considerable amount of improvement on relationships between black and white, discrimination still seems to present itself through the implementation of Affirmative Action. Managing diversity is crucial for the effective management and development of people. It is important not to focus only on cultural differences but also concentrate on individual needs and perceptions.

Unfortunately, it appears that South Africa is in the process of making the same mistakes as other countries in focusing on a power game and corruption. Black employees in particular, seem to be actively recruited, placed in senior positions and given the related finishing. In other words top management are using their 'power' to enforce Affirmative Action. There are also those who want to abuse the system or maybe understand the system incorrectly. Corruption coming from top management tends to make employees negative. In order to address these issues, a succession and career planning process needs to exist which is closely tied to the organisations' strategic plan. Employment Equity, as a strategic objective, is managed by the organisation, but needs the

Human Resources function in a support and consultancy role. As such, it requires translation into practical objectives for departments, managers and employees.

Recommendations were made for future research.

OPSOMMING

Titel: Die beleving van Regstellende Aksie in 'n publieke organisasie.

Sleutelwoorde: Regstellende Aksie, Gelyke Geleentheid, Diskriminasie, Werkstevredenheid, Publieke Sektor, Private Sektor.

Suid-Afrika beleef 'n proses van ontsaglike en fundamentele verandering. Openbare administrateurs asook politici verkeer onder geweldige druk aangesien hoë eise aan hulle gestel word. Hierdie eise sluit in om intervensies te hanteer soos Regstellende Aksie, Indiensnemingsgelykheid en die belangrikheid daarvan om diversiteit in die werkplek te bestuur. Ondanks verbetering in rasseverhouding gedurende die afgelope twintig jaar kom wanfunksionerende en swak gedrag steeds voor. Dit kan 'n weerspieëling wees van die ongemak en vrees wat by werknemers in die werksopset ervaar word. Met die doel om gehoor te gee aan wetgewing het organisasies geleentheid aan Swart, Asiër- en Kleurling-mans en vroue, Blanke vroue en gestremdes gegee. Dit lei weer tot opvattinge van voorkeur-indiensneming. Die mening dat Regstellende Aksie met voorkeur-indiensneming verband hou en met behandeling wat op groep-lidmaatskap gebaseer is, skep weerstand teen die instel en oorspronklike doel daarvan. Die rede vir hierdie weerstand kan moontlik gekoppel wees aan die feit dat mense nog steeds diskriminasie en ongeregtigheid in die werkplek waarneem. Hierdie opvattinge blyk in openbare organisasies korrek te wees, alhoewel dié organisasies positiewe standpunt ingeneem het wat betref die implementering van Gelyke Indiensnemings- en Regstellende Aksie-planne.

'n Kwalitatiewe ontwerp met 'n beskikbaarheidsteekproef ($N = 20$) werknemers in 'n openbare organisasie, is gebruik. Die kwalitatiewe navorsing maak dit moontlik om die subjektiewe ervarings van werknemers in die openbare organisasie te bepaal. Onderhoude wat op die fenomenologiese metode gefundeer is, is gevoer met werknemers wat in verskillende afdelings en verskillende posisies in 'n openbare organisasie werksaam was. Nie-direktiewe vrae is gedurende die onderhoud gestel. Die bandopname van elke onderhoud is verbatim getranskribeer met die doel om die inligting te ontleed. Inhoudsontleding is gebruik om die navorsingsdata op 'n sistematiese, objektiewe en kwantitatiewe wyse te interpreteer. 'n Literatuurkontrolle is gedoen

om relevante navorsing te ondersoek om die vergelykbaarheid en uniekheid van die huidige navorsing te bepaal.

Die resultate het daarop gedui dat Regstellende Aksie as werktuig aangelê is om die doel daarvan te bereik deur op voorkeur-indiensneming te fokus. Uit die response was dit duidelik dat die meerderheid deelnemers van mening is dat voorkeuraanstellings tot die indiensneming van onbevoegde kandidate lei. Uit die onderhoude het dit geblyk dat aanstellings gemaak word sonder dat meriete 'n rol gespeel het. Dit druis in teen die basiese beginsel van die openbare organisasie om werknemers volgens gestelde standaarde aan te stel en te bevorder. Weens die feit dat voorheen benadeelde groepe in posisies geplaas word waarin hulle geen ervaring het of waarvoor hulle nie opgelei is nie, blyk werksverwante kennis 'n probleem te wees. Dit het uit die onderhoude geblyk dat werknemers gemeen het dat swak kliëntediens dwarsoor die hele organisasie toegeneem het weens die aanstelling van onbevoegde kandidate. Hierdie feit blyk ook 'n invloed te hê op die werklading wat hanteer moet word.

Dit kom voor of oorwegend blanke werknemers geneig is om gemengde gevoelens te hê oor Regstellende Aksie. Deel van die rede vir hierdie ambivalensie is die vrees vir verandering, veral as daardie verandering 'n radikale heroorweging van strategieë uit die verlede behels. Blanke werknemers, wat deur die ou apartheidstelsel in diens geneem is, voel in die nuwe Regstellende-aksieproses vervreem en/of gemarginaliseer. Blanke werknemers verlaat ook organisasies omdat dit blyk dat hulle nie deel uit maak van die Regstellende-aksieproses nie. Dit lei tot 'n verlies aan kundigheid wat in organisasies voorkom. Hoewel organisasies heelwat verbetering ten opsigte van verhoudings tussen swart en blank toon, kom diskriminasie blykbaar steeds voor deur die implementering van Regstellende Aksie. Om diversiteit te bestuur is van kritieke belang vir die doeltreffende bestuur en ontwikkeling van mense. Dit is belangrik om nie alleen klem op kulturele verskille te lê nie, maar ook om op individuele behoeftes en opvattinge te konsentreer.

Ongelukkig lyk dit asof Suid-Afrika besig is om dieselfde foute as ander lande te begaan deur op magspeletjies en korrupsie te fokus. Swart werknemers, in besonder, blyk daadwerklik gewerf en in senior posisies geplaas te word en verwante duidelikhede gegee te word. Met ander woorde topbestuur gebruik hul 'mag' om Regstellende Aksie af te dwing. Daar is ook diegene wat die

stelsel wil misbruik of dalk die stelsel verkeerd verstaan. Korrupsie vanaf topbestuur is geneig om werknemers negatief te stem. Om hierdie aspek aan te spreek, moet 'n opvolg- en loopbaanbeplanningsproses bestaan wat ten nouste aansluit by die strategiese plan van die organisasie. Indiensnemingsgelykheid, as 'n strategiese doelwit, word deur die organisasie bestuur, maar het die Mensehulpbron-funksie in 'n ondersteunings- en raadgewende rol nodig. As sodanig vereis dit omsetting in praktiese doelwitte vir departemente, bestuurders en werknemers.

Aanbevelings is gemaak vir toekomstige navorsing.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation focuses on the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.

Chapter 1 contains the problem statement as well as the research methodology employed. The chapter starts out with a problem statement, giving an overview of previous related research conducted on Affirmative Action and the experience of Affirmative Action specifically in public organisations, linking it with this research project and its research objectives. A discussion on the research method follows, including details regarding the empirical study, research design, participants and data collection. It concludes with a chapter summary giving an overview of the chapters that comprise this mini-dissertation.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The increasing complexity of the South African business environment is making heavy and new demands on organisations. These new demands include visible forces such as technological revolution (Anstey, 1992), stronger economic dependency among countries, international competition and shifts of political power (Human, 1997; Thomas, 1997). As a result, it became apparent that if South Africa is to maintain and increase its economic well-being and growth, it will need to follow a path of developing its most valuable asset, namely human potential (Human, Bluen, & Davies, 1999). Related strategies were and are necessary to achieve this. Strategies and interventions, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity, and the emphasis of managing diversity in the workplace were implemented in the past few years in order to address this issue (Booth, 1995; Human, 1995).

After the transformation process in 1994, the South African Constitution guaranteed that all citizens are equal before the law (Stacey, 2003), thus creating the path for the implementation of the aforementioned strategies and interventions. This ensured that all citizens should enjoy equally and to the same extent, the rights and freedom that the Constitution enshrines. Every

individual is assured of the enjoyment of basic rights to the same degree as all other individuals in society (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). The state therefore treated the people of the country equally in so far as each person is formally given the same space and opportunity as everyone else to make what he or she will of their life (Human, et al., 1999). In the Constitution, the advancement of specific identified groups or individuals who were previously hampered in the pursuit of their life goals and ambitions were also accommodated (Booth, 1995; Stacey, 2003).

Since the progression of South Africa to a democracy, many organisations have been attempting to introduce this concept of equality of career opportunity into their policies. Through the enforcement of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998), the government laid the basis for Affirmative Action in employment law and the implementation thereof in organisations. The Act states that all employers should take steps to promote equal opportunities in the workplace and eliminate unfair discrimination. Affirmative Action seems to be a temporary intervention designed to achieve equal employment opportunities without lowering standards and without unduly trammelling the career aspirations or expectations of current organisational members who are competent in their jobs (Human, 1991). Affirmative Action is therefore consistent with the ideal of equality to the extent that it eliminates the disadvantages of an unequal distribution of resources (Agocs & Burr, 1996). A positive outcome of a properly implemented Affirmative Action programme can be the better management of human resources and a rising of standards (Human, et al., 1999). However, the implementation of strategies and intervention such as Affirmative Action has challenged many organisations to change in almost all areas of their existence (Human, 1997).

Still, it has been widely argued that the removal of discriminatory employment practices and the provision of equal opportunities are good for business and gives a competitive edge to the organisation (Pickard, 1999). Perceptions of equal opportunities can be positively linked to job satisfaction. Discrimination and a lack of equal opportunities could contribute to job dissatisfaction and turnover among previously disadvantaged groups (i.e. Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people) (Mason, 1997). Some beneficial effects of equal opportunities are direct and quantifiable, such as the reduction in costs

related to staff turnover and the accessing of largely untapped reserves of skill and talent through a wider pool of applicants (Mason, 1997).

In identifying the need to address inequalities in its practices, the private as well as the public sector experience similar problems (Dainty, Bagilhole, Ansari, & Jackson, 2004). Affirmative Action is perceived as a controversial concept. It raises fears in people's minds of declining standards, token appointments, the end of merit as the basis for promotion and advancement, and a rapid decline in economy (De Jong & Visser, 2000). These fears mostly emanate from white people, and are further reinforced when black people are appointed to senior positions in response to the Employment Equity legislation (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). Misperceptions of Affirmative Action seem to be more prevalent in organisations where management structures previously have been dominated by white males. This is due to the fact that attempts to implement Affirmative Action programmes seems to have failed as a result of resistance from both white and black corps, unrealistic expectations of Affirmative Action candidates, an overall resistance to change, and a lack of or insufficient training and development of Affirmative Action candidates (Weiner, 1993).

Another perception is that Affirmative Action programmes may cause organisations to push the worst-off candidates in minority groups even lower down. This is done by giving preference to the better qualified in the minority group (Van Wyk, 1998). This claim is based on the assumption that an individual's qualifications are a direct inverse consequence of the degree to which he or she suffered under discrimination, and that the aim of Affirmative Action appears to be to focus on individuals at the bottom end of the designated group, rather than to improve the average relative position of the group as a whole (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

Affirmative Action lies in the ability to understand and accept cultural differences and not to force people to change and live in a new cultural setting (De Jong & Visser, 2000). It is responsible for bringing people from previously disadvantaged groups into the work environment through recruitment and promotion, depending on their ability and potential. This aim of Affirmative Action therefore makes it important to focus on changing the mindsets of employees to develop a shared vision of the organisational culture (Den Hartog & Verburg,

2004) instead on focusing on enhancing misperceptions of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action is not about fads, morals, levelling playing fields or moving goalposts (Jankowitz, 1995). It is about developing a growth strategy that will result in organisations becoming world class and competitive by investing in their human capital (Jankowitz, 1995).

As Affirmative Action is an important component of an organisation's Employment Equity strategy, managing diversity also forms an integral part of this strategy. Managing diversity is primarily concerned with the improvement of interpersonal and inter-group communication and relationships in the workplace (Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004). The generic reasons for organisations to manage diversity is to tap into a range of skills the organisation has never attracted before, to retain the best talent and to promote better productivity as a result of employee job satisfaction (Thomas, 1997). From the perspective of the employee, managing diversity will result in effective coaching and mentoring by committed management by allowing all people to utilise their skills and potential to the maximum and the inclusion of non-designated groups (i.e. white males) in future development and training (Dainty, et al., 2004). It appears that the monetary value of developing minority groups is very high for organisations, and they should see this as an investment with a bigger pay-off in the longer term. The economy of the country depends on how well organisations invest in the development of their workforce (Ruthven, 2000).

Although previous research (see Reddy & Choudree, 1996) has been published on the experience of Affirmative Action and lessons learned from other countries, very little research was found in the South African context. No research could be found on the experience of those people who have been promoted or appointed in accordance with an Affirmative Action programme in South Africa, and specifically on employees working in the public sector. The objective of this research is therefore to determine the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.

The following research questions emerge from the problem statement:

- How is Affirmative Action conceptualised from the literature?
- What is the experience of Affirmative Action according to the literature?

- What is the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation?

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

1.2.1 General objective

With reference to the above formulation of the problem, the general objective of this research is to determine the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.

1.2.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To conceptualise Affirmative Action from the literature.
- To determine the experience of Affirmative Action according to the literature.
- To determine the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.
- To make recommendations for future research.

1.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method for the purpose of this mini-dissertation consists of a brief literature review and an empirical study. Because separate chapters were not targeted for a literature review, this paragraph focuses on aspects relevant to the empirical study that is conducted. The results obtained from the research will be presented in article format.

1.3.1 Literature review

The literature review focuses on previous research on Affirmative Action and the experience thereof in a South African public organisation. An overview is given of the conceptualisation of

this construct as well as the experience thereof from the literature. The reader should note that a literature study is conducted for the purposes of the article.

1.3.2 Research design

For purposes of this research, a qualitative design is used. Qualitative research makes it possible to determine the subjective experiences of Affirmative Action in a public organisation (McMurty, 1988). Qualitative research is defined as the study of people in their natural environments as they go about their daily lives (Bailey, 1994). Despite the negativity surrounding the use of qualitative research, Woods and Catanzaro (1988) indicated that the validity of qualitative research is one of its biggest advantages.

1.3.3 Participants

The participants consisted of an availability sample of employees working in a public organisation ($N = 20$). It is clear from Woods and Catanzaro (1988) that small samples can provide reliable research data and is therefore acceptable for phenomenology studies. The sample consisted mainly of White (60,00%) male (70,00%) employees aged between 40 and 49 years (60,00%) with a Degree (35,00%) in a Middle Management or Lower Management position (40,00%).

1.3.4 Data collection

An interview, based on the phenomenological method, was used for gathering the data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher had put all the participants at ease by ensuring that they all clearly understood what was expected of them. The interviews were non-directive, for example: 'How do you experience Affirmative Action in the public sector?'

The interviews took place in a venue with enough ventilation, lighting and comfortable chairs. A tape recorder was used with the permission of the participants in order to ensure that no information got lost (Omery, 1983). The candidates were put at ease before commencing with

the interviews. The researcher introduced herself during the beginning of each interview and also explained the context of the interview. Non-directive dialogue techniques such as attentive body language, reflection, clarification, minimal encouragement and silence were used to assist the participants in sharing their experiences (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1994).

The researcher transcribed the tape recordings of the interviews verbatim in order to analyse the information. Content analysis (Giorgi, 1985) was used to analyse and interpret the research data in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner. Content analysis consists of the following steps (Giorgi, 1985; Kerlinger, 1986):

- The first step is to universalise the context that needs to be analysed (for example the entire set of verbal answers of the participants), to be defined and to be categorised.
- The second step is to determine the sub-units of the analysis, namely words and themes. The researcher reads the responded notes in order to form an overall picture. Afterwards, she once again reads through it in order to determine the themes. The words that are used by the participant are the smallest analysis that can be made. A sub-theme is usually a sentence and is more difficult but also more useful to analyse. Sub-themes can be combined in order to determine the themes. The analysis of the information is continued until repeated themes have been identified.
- The third step is to free the data from unnecessary information and to determine the meaning of the rest of the subunits by linking it to the whole picture.
- The fourth step consists of the conversion of the concrete language that has been used by the participants, into scientific language and concepts. The precise words of the participants are used in support. An integration and synthesis is then done, based on gained insights.

The number of objects per category were counted and placed in order of preference. The trustworthiness of the content analysis is promoted by the coding that was done by the researcher and the independent psychologist with a thorough background based on facilitation. A literature-control was done to investigate relevant research in order to determine the comparativeness and uniqueness of the current research (Krefting, 1991).

The researcher strives to promote the validity by spending enough time with the participant in order to establish a rapport. Social-desirable responses were minimised by applying dialogue techniques. Rephrasing and repetition of questions were used in order to gain information credibility. The researcher made use of a diary to highlight the ideas and feelings of the respondents during the research process. These notes consist of information concerning the problems and frustrations that have been experienced (Krefting, 1991).

1.4. CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 focused on the problem statement and objectives of the study, as well as the research methodology employed. This was followed by a layout of the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 will focus on the experience of affirmative action in a public organisation.

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CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EXPERIENCE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN A PUBLIC ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is experiencing a process of formidable and fundamental change. Public administrators as well as politicians are under tremendous pressure as heavy demands are being placed on them. These demands include coping with interventions such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity, and the importance of managing diversity in the workplace. The objective of this study was to determine the experience of Affirmative Action of employees working in a public organisation. Interviews based on the phenomenological method were conducted on 20 employees working in a public organisation. The results indicated that Affirmative Action led to incompetent appointments, a lack of sufficient training, discrimination, feelings of job insecurity, and cultural matters. Respondents also experience that politics and legislation played a major role in the implementation of Affirmative Action resulting in work overload for some employees, poor customer service, a possibility of power play, misuse of affirmative action employees, lack of discipline, corruption and lack of sufficient succession planning. Results also indicated policy and strategy problems, and a loss of expertise in the organisation due to negative emotions and experience towards the implementation of Affirmative Action.

OPSOMMING

Suid-Afrika ondervind 'n proses van ontsaglike en grondige verandering. Openbare administrateurs asook politici verkeer onder geweldige druk aangesien hoë eise aan hulle gestel word. Hierdie eise sluit in om intervensies te hanteer soos Regstellende Aksie, Indiensnemingsgelykheid en die belangrikheid daarvan om diversiteit in die werkplek te bestuur. Die doelwit van hierdie studie, was om die ervaring van Regstellende Aksie van werknemers, werksaam in 'n publieke organisasie te bepaal. Onderhoude wat op die fenomenologiese metode gefundeer is, is gevoer met 20 werknemers wat in 'n openbare organisasie werksaam is. Die resultate het daarop gedui dat Regstellende Aksie lei tot onbevoegde aanstellings, verlies aan voldoende opleiding, diskriminasie, gevoelens van verlies aan werksekuriteit, en kulturele kwessies. Respondente het ook ervaar dat politiek en wetgewing 'n groot rol speel in die implementering van Regstellende Aksie, wat tot verhoogde werksdruk vir sommige werknemers, swak kliëntediens, die moontlikheid van magspeletjies, misbruik van Regstellende aksie werknemers, tekort aan dissipline, korrupsie, en 'n tekort aan opvolgebepanning lei. Resultate het

verder getoon dat beleids en strategie probleme, sowel as 'n verlies aan kundigheid in die organisasie weens negatiewe gevoelens en ervaringe met die implementering van Regstellende Aksie nogsteeds bestaan.

The demise of formal policies and structures of apartheid in 1994 has resulted in South Africa emerging from a position of relative isolation to a position where it has to compete in the global marketplace (Thomas, 1997). As a result, it became apparent that if South Africa is to maintain and increase its economic well-being and growth, it is sure to follow a path of developing its most valuable asset, namely human potential (Human, Bluen, & Davies, 1999). In order to develop human potential, strategies and interventions, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and Diversity Management is needed to aid organisations by giving guidelines in achieving equity in the workplace (Human, 1997). The present government tried to correct the historical imbalances by introducing these aforementioned policies with specific attention to public organisations (Reddy & Choudree, 1996). It is generally accepted that public organisations are non-party-political by nature, in the sense that they are simply there to assist the executive functions of whatever government happens to be in power (Meyerson, 1999; Stacey, 2003). All eyes therefore rested on public organisations, as an administrative arm of the government, to implement these policies in order to reflect the demographic profile of the country (Reddy & Choudree, 1996).

Reddy and Choudree (1996) indicated that laws in the private sector that explicitly disadvantaged black employees and promoted white employees were opposed to public service acts, where no racial connotations exist. Given the high unemployment rate and the long history of discrimination among black employees, the public services has been given the opportunity to redress the past by employing black employees rather than focusing on employing white employees only. It is believed that through this process a moral and economic symmetry may be reached (Nel, 2000). Public organisations in a post-apartheid South Africa can therefore play a pivotal role in creating a reconciliatory and development friendly environment through the effective and efficient implementation of policies, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and Diversity Management.

Taking the above into consideration, it seems that present public organisations, especially with specific reference to leadership, can be challenged by the old apartheid traditions and the demands of adjusting to new demands of a non-racial society (Meyerson, 1999). Behaviour that is therefore dysfunctional and ineffective emanating from black employees, is rather a reflection

of the discomfort and anxiety experienced in the unfamiliar and predominantly white work setting than a reflection of one's basic competence (Meyerson, 1999). However, despite improvements in race relations, incidents reflecting prejudice still occur (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). This seems true even though the public organisation has taken a positive position on racial integration in the work place through sincere and comprehensive implementation of Equal Employment and Affirmative Action plans.

From the above, it is clear that organisations are facing many different challenges. They need to manage Affirmative Action correctly, as the mismanagement of it may negatively impact on the lives of those it affects. Human, et al. (1999) argues that human dignity, self-confidence, motivation and productivity may all suffer in the process. As Employment Equity and related strategies of Affirmative Action are necessary, it must be recognised that these strategies target individuals from designated groups. The organisational context within which designated groups work must be prepared to sustain Employment Equity initiatives (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). This is more difficult to achieve because it involves paradigm shifts, challenging stereotypes and embracing risk to create and sustain an organisational environment within which people, representing a broad range of diversity evident in our country, can work together effectively (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). If Affirmative Action is to play a constructive and meaningful role in the economic and social future of this country, it is imperative that it wins the support of as wide a section of management and employees as possible (Innes, Kentridge, & Perold, 1993). Although Affirmative Action seems superficially to favour only particular sections of the South African population, when implemented and understood correctly, it will be to the advantage of all South Africans. Skretny (1995) is of opinion that in order to achieve this, a deeper understanding of all strategies and interventions, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity, and the emphasis of managing diversity in the workplace are needed.

Affirmative Action

With the enforcement of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998), the government laid the basis for Affirmative Action in employment law and the implementation thereof in organisations (Human, 1997). The Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998) states that employment equity involves both the elimination of unfair discrimination and the establishment of specific measures to accelerate the advancement of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people (Stacey, 2003). One of the measures to accelerate the advancement of these designated groups is Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action includes specific plans and efforts along with preferential treatment in appointments and promotions. As such, Affirmative Action is part of the process of Employment Equity, which includes a broader range of activities (Human, et al., 1999).

Affirmative Action, as an example of different treatment, is consistent with the ideal of equality to the extent that it eliminates the disadvantages of an unequal distribution of resources (Stacey, 2003). Although organisations between 1960 and 1990 concentrated on treating people equally, where differences were ignored and the focus were more on the 'sameness' between individuals, organisations however still lack the component of equity (Davidson & Fielden, 2003). Equity are recognised when people are treated equitable and differences are recognised (Davidson & Fielden, 2003), which is more consistent with fairness. From the differences between equality and equity it is believed that Affirmative Action should be implemented to ensure equity in organisations. Since the progress of South Africa to a democracy, many organisations have been attempting to introduce this concept of equity into their policies (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). However, very few organisations act neutral about implementing equity. Those who are opposed to Affirmative Action condemn it as window-dressing, the fulfilment of quotas, and as a numbers game (Human, et al., 1999) and in some circumstances as a bigger focus on equality instead of equity.

Attempts to appear acceptable to the political regime in the country, as well as fears of future labour legislation, have emerged as reasons for engaging in Affirmative Action programmes

(Leopeng, 1999). Affirmative Action programmes have generally involved targeting and placing historically disadvantaged people in strategic positions in the corporate world or on boards of management in non-executive positions. In an attempt to conform to the specified requirements of the quota system, some Affirmative Action appointees held their positions merely to window-dress or to meet a goal (Human, et al., 1999). Usually this is done without consideration of the person's ability to be successful or without suitable training support and development (De Jong & Visser, 2000).

This form of tokenism is particularly invidious as it sets black people from designated groups up for failure and often reconfirms the already negative stereotypes many white people have of them (Human, et al., 1999). It appears that organisations in South Africa are in the process of making the same mistakes as other countries in focusing on the politically correct numbers game while implementing their Affirmative Action programmes (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). The public organisation is also founded on the basic principle of hiring and promoting by merit. To pass over the best-qualified candidate to choose a lesser-qualified candidate from a designated group dismisses the merit principle and replaces it with the quota system (Ruthven, 2000). Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) suggests that organisations need to see beyond the targets or numbers game and seriously consider how they will begin to address the harnessing of the workforce diversity, created by programmes of Affirmative Action, for competitive advantage in both local and global marketplaces. It became apparent that only few organisations have undertaken holistic programmes of Affirmative Action which actively seek to train, develop, and promote Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people into positions of policy and decision-making power. Given the absence of certain groups, a quota system may result in reduced standards, diminished professionalism levels and in the event damage productivity (Adams, 1997).

Although Affirmative Action programmes create tremendous opportunities for Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people, the realistic view that it involves preferential hiring and treatment based on group membership, creates tremendous resistance as a result of perceived injustice (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Affirmative Action programmes, of which one of the main objectives is the achievement of equity, also gives new

weight to the argument that preferential hiring hurts the very groups it seeks to help (Adams, 1997). Any form of preferential hiring aimed at bringing workforce demographics in line with that of the broader population implies quotas whether or not specified (Cunningham, 1997). In addressing the issue of preferential hiring, competence should therefore be clearly defined, and correct requirements should be set for positions (Ruthven, 2000).

The question can be raised to how much longer this process is going to take to be completely in line with relevant legislation (Ruthven, 2000). It appears that this point will only be reached when all employees are treated fairly and can compete equally in an environment of Employment Equity and when the under-representation in the employer's workforce has been meaningfully addressed (Stacey, 2003). If one excludes the time frame from this perceived dilemma, an acceptable answer may be found in the term suitably qualified, where employees cannot be expected to be appointed or promoted since the employer's obligation to take steps towards achieving equitable representation across job categories and levels only extends to suitably qualified people (Baron, 2004). Suitably qualified people should satisfy any one or a combination of the following criteria and these criteria should form part of the inherent job requirements (Ruthven, 2000; South Africa, 1998):

- They should have the right formal qualification;
- They should have been exposed to prior learning;
- They should have relevant experience; and
- They should have the capacity to acquire, within a reasonable period, the ability to do the job.

The fact that quality still leads to an advantage in terms of competitors, remains undeniable (Leopeng, 1999). With Employment Equity appointments, the possibility exists that standards will drop if unsuitable qualified people with no potential are appointed to positions (Leopeng, 1999). The negative side to these appointments is that Affirmative Action programmes may cause organisations to push the worst-off candidates in minority groups even lower down. This is done by giving preference to the better qualified in the minority group (Van Wyk, 1998). This claim is based on the assumption that an individual's qualifications are a direct inverse

consequence of the degree to which he or she suffered under discrimination. The aim of Affirmative Action appears to be to focus on individuals at the bottom end of the designated group, rather than to improve the average relative position of the group as a whole (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

Equal opportunities may not only be linked to better jobs for suitable qualified people, but can also be positively related to employees' perceptions of job satisfaction (De Jong & Visser, 2000). When employees see equal opportunities lacking, they may be more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs, and vice versa (De Jong & Visser, 2000). A significant number of employees seem to be looking for alternative career opportunities when equal opportunities are not forthcoming or when they are marginalised or treated as tokens (Human, et al., 1999). Bendix (2001) explains that the problem can be further described by situations of poaching or job-hopping as a result of the known low (1%) black population that possessed tertiary qualifications in 1994. This resulted in a highly small sought-after group of elite candidates continually moving between employers. Once again it appears that only this portion of the designated groups advanced whilst the rest of the group remained unaffected. Thomas (1997) predicted that this may only be a temporary phase, and that positive changes are certain to occur in the educational, social and experiential profile of the population. It is therefore necessary that a balance needs to be achieved between bringing in members of designated groups and ensuring that they are satisfied and productive once they are there (Baron, 2004).

Within the broader framework of change represented by Employment Equity and Affirmative Action, management of diversity could be a complementary initiative towards both equity and greater productivity in organisations (Baron, 2004). Managing diversity encompasses a range of activities aimed at making the organisation more aware or mindful that minority groups, due to their upbringing, may espouse different values and assumptions which can affect the way they co-operate, compete, communicate, plan, organise, and are motivated (Morrison, 1992).

Thomas (1997) advocates the generic reasons for an organisation to embark upon managing diversity, include tapping into a range of skills, which the organisation never had before attracted, retaining the best talent and promoting better productivity as a result of employee job

satisfaction (Lakhani, 1994; Mason, 1997). Commitment from management can lead to positive results, and achievement will be forthcoming through effective coaching and mentoring. A positive outcome will be visible when allowing all people to utilise their skills and potential to the maximum and by including the non-designated groups (i.e. white males) in future development and training (Dainty, Bagilhole, Ansari, & Jackson 2004; Human & Bowmaker-Falconer, 1992). Another positive outcome concerning managing diversity is that it can also assist employees and managers more effectively to serve a heterogeneous customer and client base and may prove to be a good investment for those who work in service functions (Dainty, et al., 2004). Mkhwanazi and Rall (1994) indicated that the immediate short-term cost of developing previously disadvantaged groups need to be seen against the long-term need to advance these groups. Large sums of money are involved in developing designated groups, but this has to be taken as an investment with a bigger payoff in the longer term. The economy depends on how well organisations invest in the development of their workforce (Ruthven, 2000). Thus the goal of valuing diversity is to capitalise on the strengths of each individual or subgroup to ensure that the whole is larger than the sum of the parts (Tung, 1995) and in effect enhance equity.

Although previous research (see Reddy & Choudree, 1996) has been published on the experience of Affirmative Action and lessons learned from other countries, very little research could be traced in the South African context. No research could be found concerning the experience of those who have been promoted or appointed in accordance with an Affirmative Action programme in South Africa and specifically on the experiences of employees working in the public sector. The objective of this research therefore is to determine the experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation.

METHOD

Research design

A qualitative design was used. Qualitative research makes it possible to determine the subjective experiences of Affirmative Action in a public organisation (McMurty, 1988). Qualitative research is defined as the study of people in their natural environments as they go about their

daily lives. This is mainly done by means of naturalistic methods of study, analysing the conversations and interaction that the researcher has with subjects (Bailey, 1994; De Vos, 1998). Despite the negativity surrounding the use of qualitative research, Woods and Catanzaro (1988) indicated that the validity of qualitative research is one of its biggest advantages.

Participants

The participants consisted of an availability sample of employees working in a public organisation ($N = 20$). It is clear from Woods and Catanzaro (1988) that small samples can deliver reliable research data and are therefore acceptable for phenomenology studies. Descriptive information of the sample is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants

Item	Category	Frequency (Percentage)
Age	20 – 29 years	1 (5,00%)
	30 – 39 years	7 (35,00%)
	40 – 49 years	12 (60,00%)
Gender	Male	14 (70,00%)
	Female	6 (30,00%)
Home language	Afrikaans	15 (75,00%)
	English	1 (5,00%)
	Northern Sotho	3 (15,00%)
	Venda	1 (5,00%)
Race	White	12 (60,00%)
	Black	4 (20,00%)
	Indian	1 (5,00%)
	Coloured	3 (15,00%)
Educational Level	Standard 2 – 5 (Grade 4 – 7)	3 (15,00%)
	Standard 6 – 10 (Grade 8 – 12)	5 (25,00%)
	National Certificate	2 (10,00%)
	Overseer Certificate	1 (5,00%)
	Diploma	2 (10,00%)
	Degree	7 (35,00%)
Organisational Level	Lower Management	8 (40,00%)
	Middle Management	8 (40,00%)
	Senior Management	4 (20,00%)

The sample consisted mainly of White (60,00%) male (70,00%) employees aged between 40 and 49 years (60,00%) with a degree (35,00%) in a Middle Management or Lower Management position (40,00%).

Data Collection

An interview, based on the phenomenological method, was used as a method for gathering the data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher had put all the participants at ease by ensuring that they

all clearly understood what was expected from them. The interviews were non-directive, for example: 'How do you experience Affirmative Action in the public sector?' Questions were posed consecutively and were well explained to everyone.

The interviews were conducted in a venue with enough ventilation, lightning and comfortable chairs. A tape-recorder was used, with the consent of the participants, to ensure that no information got lost (Omery, 1983). The candidates were put at ease before the interviews commenced. The researcher introduced herself during the beginning of each interview and also explained the context of the interview. Non-directive dialogue techniques, such as attentive body language, reflection, clarification, minimal encouragement and silence were used to assist the participants to share their experiences (Meulenbergh-Buskens, 1994).

The tape record of the interview were verbatim transcribed by the researcher in order to analyse the information. The internal validity of this study was determined via the double-blind experiment (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). This implies that neither the participants in the study nor the people involve in arranging the interviews with the participants (the Human Resource Coordinator in this case) knew what the researcher's hypotheses were.

The researcher strived to promote the internal validity by spending enough time with each participant in order to establish a rapport. Social-desirable responses were minimised by making use of dialogue techniques. Rephrasing and repetition of questions have been used in order to gain credibility of information. The researcher made use of a diary to highlight the ideas and feelings of the respondents during the research process (Vishnevsky & Beadlands, 2004). These notes consisted of information about the problems and frustrations that have been experienced (Krefting, 1991).

External validity were also promoted by the coding of the content and extracted themes that took place by the researcher and the independent psychologist with a thorough background based on facilitation. A literature-control was also done to investigate relevant research in order to determine the comparativeness and uniqueness of the current research.

If your research is valid, this means that you are observing, identifying or ‘measuring’ what you say you are (Mason, 1996). The validity of qualitative research is the result of the credibility and transferability thereof (Krefting, 1991).

Data analysis

Content analysis (Giorgi, 1985) were used to analyse and interpret the research data in a systematic, objective and quantitative way. Content analysis consists of the following steps (Giorgi, 1985; Kerlinger, 1986):

- The first step is to universalise the context that needs to be analysed (for example all the verbal answers of the participants), to be defined and to be categorised.
- The second step is to determine the subunits of the analysis, namely words and themes. The researcher reads the responded notes in order to get the whole picture. Afterwards she reads through it again in order to determine the themes. The words that are used by the participant, is the smallest analysis that can be made. A sub theme is usually a sentence and is more difficult but also more useful to analyse. Sub themes can be combined in order to determine the themes. The analysis of the information goes on until repeated themes have been identified.
- The third step is to get rid of the unnecessary information and to determine the meaning of the rest of the subunits by linking it to the whole picture.
- The fourth step consists of the conversion of the concrete language that has been used by the participants, to scientific language and concepts. The precise words of the participants are used in support. An integration and synthesis is then done based on received insights.

The amount of objects per category were counted and placed in order of preference. The trustworthiness of the content analysis is promoted by the coding that took place by the researcher and the independent psychologist with a thorough background based on facilitation.

RESULTS

The experiences of Affirmative Action of employees working in a public organisation are reported in Table 2 according to certain themes, a description of the themes, the total participants and the ranking order.

Table 2

The experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation

Theme	Description	Total Participants	Ranking
1. Incompetent Appointments	This theme refer to the appointment of unsuitably qualified people in positions.	15	1
2. Training	This theme refer to the way training is applied in the organisation with reference to both Affirmative Action appointees and white males.	6	6
3. Discrimination	This theme refer to the perception that discrimination still exists in the workplace.	11	2
4. Job Insecurity	This theme refer to the fear white employees have that they will loose their work as a result of Affirmative Action.	2	13
5. Cultural Issues	This theme refer to the impact of cultural differences in the perception of Affirmative Action.	2	13
6. Politics and legislation	This theme refer to the role politics and legislation play in the application of Affirmative Action.	8	3
7. Work overload	This theme refer to the increase of the work load of some employees as a result of people being appointed in positions for which they have no relevant training or experience.	3	9
8. Poor customer service	This theme refer to the perception that customer service is deteriorating as a result of Affirmative Action and cultural issues.	2	13

Table 2 (continue)

The experience of Affirmative Action in a public organisation

Theme	Description	Total Participants	Ranking
9. Power game	This theme refer to the enforcement of Affirmative Action due to the position a person may have.	2	13
10. Misuse of Affirmative Action appointments	This theme refer to the perception that Affirmative Action appointments are only made to reach certain targets and to the pressure put on these appointees.	3	9
11. Lack of discipline	This theme refer to the lack of discipline and disciplinary procedures in the organisation.	3	9
12. Corruption	This theme refer to the provision of positions to certain people at all costs due to the fact the you know somebody in the organisation.	1	16
13. Lack of succession planning	This theme refer to the lack of effective succession planning strategies in the organisation in terms of Affirmative Action.	5	7
14. Negative emotions and experiences	This theme refer to negative emotions and experiences with reference to the application of Affirmative Action.	7	4,5
15. Policy and strategy problems	This theme refer to the lack of sufficient policies and strategies in the organisation to successfully implement Affirmative Action.	7	4,5
16. Loss of expertise	This theme refer to the loss of expertise with reference to white employees that feel alienated by Affirmative Action and rather prefer to leave the organisation.	2	13

The following assumptions can be made, based on Table 2:

Theme 1: Incompetent appointments (Ranking=1)

This theme was mentioned by 15 participants. Leopeng (1999) is of opinion that Affirmative Action will lead to a drop in standards if unsuitable qualified people with no potential are appointed to positions. From the responses it became clear that the majority of the participants are of opinion that Affirmative Action lead to incompetent appointments. Some of the responses include: “If you employ people, you are supposed to be employing capable people so that they can be a role model. You have the scenario where people are employed in top positions that do not have the ability to be good leaders”, “People are appointed in positions for which they are not ready yet”, “It is unfair to appoint a person if he or she can’t do the work”, and “People from outside the organisation are appointed as a result of Affirmative Action without the necessary qualification and experience because they argue that they have the potential, whilst there are Affirmative Action candidates in the organisation with the necessary skills and qualifications that are overlooked”.

It appears from the interviews that appointments are also sometimes made without basing it on merit. This is against the basic principle of the public organisation of hiring and promoting employees on merit (Ruthven, 2000). To pass over the best-qualified candidate in order to choose a lesser-qualified candidate from a previously disadvantaged group dismisses the merit principle and replaces it with the quota system (Ruthven, 2000). Some of the responses included: “Affirmative Action is applied in the organisation and often to the detriment of merit” and “People are appointed with lower qualifications than some of the white employees. In other words they do not appoint the best candidate for the position”.

Many employees may resist Affirmative Action because it is seen as unjust (Skrentny, 1995). True justice though, is colour blind, it sees all citizens as equal, universal abstractions (Human, et al., 1999). Employees may differ, however, in merit, talent, or ambition, and should be rewarded on the basis of these qualities. Talent or ambition make one morally deserving, and thus for employers to choose or promote employees on the basis of something else or to prefer someone because of their race or gender, is patently unjust (Thomas, 1997).

- **Theme 3: Discrimination (Ranking=2)**

This theme was mentioned by 11 participants. Charlton and Van Niekerk (1994) warn that Affirmative Action, as was the case with apartheid, perpetuates racial discrimination and exacerbates tensions. In order to be able to benefit black employees through the use of quotas, the government have to deny opportunities for white employees (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). The Employment Equity Act (no. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998) specifically excludes setting quotas as a means of achieving equitable representation of suitably qualified persons from previously disadvantaged groups at the workplace. Some participants denied this statement, as it seems to still exist by saying: “And the quota system really hurts me! I do not wish to be a puppet in the system just because I have a different skin colour, because at a later stage, when those who believed in the quota system are no longer there and you do not deliver, some suddenly feel grieved and it all catches up with you”.

Though employers try to provide more equal opportunities, employees perceive discrimination between black and white employees to still exist in the workplace, as some of the participants stated: “I get along well with the black people. If you understand them, you grasp things better ... but at other occasions you are discriminated against – not for what you do but as a result of the colour of your skin”, “There is still a lot of discrimination against employees”, “Affirmative Action is a process to stop discrimination, however it only resulted in reversed discrimination” and “It does have a short-term disadvantage to others because it seems to favour one race or one gender group”.

Another issue that needs to be taken into consideration is the issue surrounding discrimination against women. It has been observed that discrimination not only exists between cultural groups but also between gender groups. Some of the responses included: “They say they do not discriminate against women here, but this is not true, because Council largely discriminates against women” and “If you want to upset me, bring a woman into a man’s position. If, for instance, you put a woman in a managerial position where she must work with men, it is not Affirmative Action but just a process of making a mess of things”.

Discrimination on the grounds of lack of relevant experience alone is considered to be unfair. This can be resolved if competence and job requirements are clearly defined. The potential of a prospective candidate to achieve an expected standard within a reasonable time must also be considered (Thomas, 1997). If Affirmative Action carries on forever, then it may become reverse discrimination against white male employees (Ruthven, 2000). Affirmative Action is only meant to be temporary in order to level the playing fields (Thomas, 1997). It strives to bridge the gap for disadvantaged groups so that a situation of equal opportunities for all can be reached.

- **Theme 6: Politics and legislation (Ranking=3)**

This theme was mentioned by 8 participants. In an attempt to conform to legislation, an organisation can find itself, consciously or sub-consciously, in an Affirmative Action dilemma (Reddy & Choudree, 1996). On the one side of this dilemma; a negative result is achieved, emanating from a common error some organisations are making. This refer to the appointment of a person in an Affirmative Action position, or the imposition of this appointment on the organisation, merely to window-dress or to meet a goal. Usually this is done without consideration of the person's ability to be successful or without suitable training, support and development (Dainty, et al., 2004). This error may cause controversy, unhappiness and ultimate failure of both the candidate and the initiative. Some of the responses included: "People are sitting in the wrong positions simply for the sake of affirmative action ... for window-dressing. This verges on politics. The politicians are going too far; the act, as such, is not the problem. But the execution of the act is not correct – guidelines are vague", "The South African government is trying to enforce equity too fast", "Politics are overriding the processes, that makes everything extremely difficult" and "One should get to the point where politics are left out of equity appointments".

On the other side of this dilemma are dissatisfied employees, since they have been placed in meaningless positions or have no hope of making a success of the required functions or tasks (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Such individuals may then increasingly feel negatively stigmatised as unqualified or incompetent if hired on the basis of Affirmative Action, as one respondent highlighted: "I was also hired under that cloud of Affirmative Action. I experience it as

sometimes frustrating, very depressing and stressful, because you cannot be successful if you are not supported. They just throw you in there and add to the number they have fired”.

- **Theme 14: Negative emotions and experiences (Ranking=4,5)**

This theme was mentioned by 7 participants. The optimism shared by human resources personnel and some managers about the efficiency of people development systems is often not shared by members of previously disadvantaged groups. Some responses included: “I also often see that when positions are advertised, you will find few coloureds being appointed, especially in the higher positions” and “We experience it as negative at this stage”. Some white respondents also feel that they are not being used to their full potential and are being overlooked in terms of development and promotion opportunities (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Responses included: “I feel slightly insulted because we teach the black people but they get preference if promotion comes up, and they also get it. One becomes negative about your work”, and “I experience Affirmative Action as totally negative as it is used as a weapon”.

It appears that little advancement has been made regarding equal opportunities in organisations due to the fact that such a strategy often implies a painful change in the structure, culture and operations of the organisation (Rheem, 1996). The reason for this can be that change raises fears in people’s minds of declining standards, token appointments, the end of merit as the basis for promotion and advancement, and of South Africa’s rapid decline in economy (De Jong & Visser, 2000). These fears mostly emanate from white people and are further reinforced when black people are appointed to senior positions in response to the Employment Equity legislation (No.55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998). Some of the responses included: “I have been in this position since I was 32 years old, and I know that I will retire in this position. There is no future for me in this organisation – I am a white male!” and “It is no use applying for promotion; they do not even consider experience. They look at the colour of your skin, and this is rather sad. You often feel helpless”. Most of the time the employees, specifically white employees, feel that their careers are limited.

The irony of this restraint is that the more personal fears, myths, prejudices and conflicting interests are left unattended; the more the constraint closes up. Stereotypes consist of information and beliefs about specific groups and are essentially negative by nature. If morale is low and perceptions of management are poor, it is unlikely that high productivity will be obtained (Thomas, 1997).

- **Theme 15: Policy and strategy problems (Ranking=4,5)**

This theme was mentioned by 7 participants. Employment Equity and Affirmative Action are processes which should be holistic and integrated, involving the entire organisation and all of its factors (Human, et al., 1999). It also requires the active and long-term commitment of senior managers to implement, monitor and evaluate the success of these programmes while implementing it (Wingrove, 1994).

Employment Equity, as a strategic objective, is managed by the organisation, but needs the Human Resources function in a support and consultancy role (Wingrove, 1994). As such, it requires translation into practical objectives for departments, managers and employees through the creation of certain policies and strategies. However some of the participants experienced that the organisation do not have sufficient policies and strategies in place to successfully implement Affirmative Action. Some of the responses included: “There should be clear guidelines in our department, a document which should indicate on which bases one should discriminate between applicants and which positions should be reserved for a certain colour or gender”, “Guidelines are vague” and “You cannot implement processes if there is no policies”.

- **Theme 2: Training (Ranking=6)**

This theme was mentioned by 6 participants. Development is a process involving a complex interaction between the individual’s perceived ability, his or her motivation, and the way he or she is managed (Dainty, et al., 2004). Poor people development and training, either through ignorance or negative stereotyping, can lead to underperformance, even in the presence of real ability. Negative expectations of previously disadvantaged group members, a belief that these

group members simply do not have what it takes, and a lack of people management skills and accountability in this area amongst leaders, are primary reasons for the failure of advancement and training programmes (Mason, 1997). In many organisations, little pressure has also been exerted on managers either to coach and develop subordinates or to acquire the skills to do this (Thomas, 1997).

Some of the participants experienced that training is a major problem in the organisation. Some of the responses included: “We receive no training ... they started a training committee that does not do anything. I requested training for the position I presently fill, but they do not give the training”, and “Another problem with our type of work load is that I do not have the time to appoint someone and then to physically train him or her. It will have to be someone who has already been trained. I requested that the person who applies for the position should be one who has already received training”.

Some participants mentioned that training is only a racial issue and that no positive results could be seen: “A further problem in the section is that the people are not being trained. Certain people (i.e. black employees) attend courses for window-dressing purposes, and others are not given the opportunity, in other words it is an injustice to certain people” and “There are training situations but time and again it is a colour issue”. One participant mentioned that money is the primary reason why training has failed: “We are supposed to be constantly developed, according to national legislation. With a previous opportunity we could not attend the training seminar because it would cost too much money. No money is available for the Council, yet there is R4 000,00 available to launch a one-day programme. Discrepancies occur that I do not understand”.

The training of Affirmative Action appointees create another problem for the participants. Some of the responses included: “You appoint a person and train him or her but due to Affirmative Action, this person is in demand. After you have trained this individual for may be a year, he or she leaves the position for a higher position and you don’t reap the benefits of the training you have provided” and “You have to train an Affirmative Action employee under you to get the position above you just because you are not one of the previously disadvantaged group members”.

Still besides these perceptions, Affirmative Action requires more than just the training and development of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people. It also requires fairly major restructuring of the way in which human resources are recruited, promoted, and developed (Mason, 1997). This, in turn, involves training and assessing managers in the coaching role and a corresponding adoption of reward structures.

- **Theme 13: Lack of succession planning (Ranking=7)**

This theme was mentioned by 5 participants. Affirmative Action needs to be managed as a strategic objective. For example, in order for people to be developed, a need exists for workforce, succession, and career planning to be tied into the strategic plan (Human, et al., 1999). Many organisations lack effective workforce, succession, and career planning. This is partly due to the pitfalls of the strategic planning process, which may, in part, be related to the uncertainties of the broader economic environment (Human, et al., 1999). In some instances, sophisticated technology gets in the way of the practical understanding and implementation of these processes by managers who need to feel that such systems are assisting rather than hindering them (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

Some participants mentioned: “I think the big problem of city councils is that they want to perform too quickly in successfully applying Affirmative Action without aligning their succession plan to promote people within the organisation who already have received training and appointing new people in the lower ranks so that top positions could be given to those with experience”, “I think a big problem in the city councils is that they do not have a succession plan in place. If people have 20 years service, it can be a good thing to utilise their experience and use them as directors. It can then also be their exit strategy. In doing this they can train people from within the organisation and as such improve their quality” and “You cannot promote people for the sake of promoting them”.

- **Theme 7: Work overload (Ranking=9)**

This theme was mentioned by 3 participants. Affirmative Action has been designed to achieve equal employment opportunity without lowering standards and without unduly trammelling the career aspirations or expectations of current organisational members who are competent in their jobs (Human, 1991). Due to the fact that previously disadvantaged groups are being placed in positions of which they have no experience or are not trained in, this lack of understanding seems to present a problem (Meyerson, 1999). This also seems to have an effect on the workload being handled. Some responses included: “The work load has increased because black people do not have the experience and the years of service. They are then placed in positions where this is required. The more senior white personnel, are then expected to do the work and save the day and, in doing so, have to handle double work loads” and “We have less staff due to the freezing of some positions. This leads to work loads dramatically increasing”.

Thomas (1997) predicted that this may only be a temporary phase, and that positive changes are certain to occur in the educational, social and experiential profile of our population. It is therefore essential that a balance be achieved between bringing in members of designated groups and ensuring that they are satisfied and productive once they are there.

- **Theme 10: Misuse of Affirmative Action appointments (Ranking=9)**

This theme was mentioned by 3 participants. Organisations have spent a great deal of time getting the climate right, but have failed to act proactively enough in appointing members of previously disadvantaged groups (Leopeng, 1999). Participants experience that there is a lot of pressure on Affirmative Action appointees. Some of the responses included: “I feel sorry for the black employees because they can’t do the work, but they are only used as tokens. He or she is only used for the colour of their skin and this is absolute misuse”, and “I think there is a lot of pressure on them to perform. I think they are told that if you do not perform, you need to go”.

- **Theme 11: Lack of discipline (Ranking=9)**

This theme was mentioned by 3 participants. Managing diversity is crucial for the effective management and development of people (Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004). Managers who are prejudiced against people from a specific racial group are unlikely to manage those people effectively and to recognise and encourage their particular strengths and talents. It is also difficult for managers of this calibre to earn respect from employees for further education.

It is the responsibility of management to not only educate their staff on culture differences, but also the more important basics such as responsibility and discipline (De Jong & Visser, 2000). The concept of responsibility and discipline lies not only with one's work, but also how you interact and respect other people and the effective use of disciplinary procedures in the organisations. It seems that discipline or the lack thereof is a problem in the organisation. Some of the responses included: "It seems that with the knowledge disappearing in the organisation, discipline also became non-existent in our departments" and "I work with a lot of black people, and I feel as if I do not have any control. I don't believe in disciplining them if they misbehave as they are covered in one or another way".

- **Theme 4: Job insecurity (Ranking=13)**

This theme was mentioned by 2 participants. The implementation of Affirmative Action is part of the broader process of transformation and democracy in South Africa. Predominantly white businesses tend to be ambivalent towards Affirmative Action (Qunta, 1995). Part of the reason for this ambivalence is the fear of change, especially when that change involves a radical re-thinking of past strategies. These fears mostly emanate from white employees. One participant mentioned "My biggest fear, naturally, is that if the province takes us over that I will have to apply for my own position and that I will not be re-appointed. Therefore I am also worried about my own job security".

The problem is that organisations are appointing black people in positions without doing a lot to dispel white fears or focussing on changing the culture of the organisation (De Jong & Visser,

2000). The question asked by many white males is what the advantages are for them in training a coloured person for their position (Human, et al., 1999). They have to provide this training, knowing well that the individual they have trained may replace them in due course. One participant mentioned: “I do not believe that white people are prepared to train people of colour, because they fear that the blacks will take over their work”.

- **Theme 5: Cultural issues (Ranking=13)**

This theme was mentioned by 2 participants. The aim of organisations should be to develop a corporate culture around flexibility in order to be able to adapt to, benefit and profit from the differences in styles, cultures and other dimensions of diversity which various members of the organisation could introduce (Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004). Diverse groups in contrast to homogeneous groups, add value to problem-solving and decision-making processes by applying a richer and broader base of experience and by providing a larger number of alternatives (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

Some participants feel that the different cultural groups can result in conflict in the organisation by mentioning: “One needs to start at cultural differences. There is a lot of misunderstandings because we all come out of different backgrounds and this creates conflict”. Some of the participants are totally prejudice in their perception of cultural differences and the impact thereof on the organisation is tremendous, it leads to stereotyping and negative stigmatising people: “Non-whites and whites have different cultures. Non-whites are not good workers, and also not good leaders while white workers will rather do their work before anything else”.

The fact remains however that the nature of all South African organisations is multiculturalism (Ruthven, 2000). The notion of differentness – both racial and ethnic – has been entrenched by the ideology of apartheid into the very core of South African life (Stacey, 2003). Apartheid distorted the concept of culture, called *ethnos*, and equated culture with folk or nation (Ruthven, 1999). Organisations that understand this past and the use of it to their advantage will reap the benefit of such differences.

- **Theme 8: Poor Customer Service (Ranking=13)**

This theme was mentioned by 2 participants. From the interviews it appeared that employees felt that customer service decreased across the organisation as a result of Affirmative Action. The creation of a vision with clear and measurable performance standards, based on the concept of total quality, may allow employees to utilise their strengths in possibly unconventional but effective ways to achieve corporate goals which lead to improved customer service (Adams, 1997).

The establishment of performance standards, which are regularly measured, elevates the issue of people management from the perceived 'soft' area of business to a quantifiable measurement more easily respected by management (Human, et al., 1999). Performance standards, accordingly, influence the design of induction, orientation and mentoring programmes (Human, et al., 1999). Needless to say, with the educational lag experienced by disadvantaged groups in South Africa, training and development should form a crucial component of all human resources planning (Dainty, et al., 2004). With the objectives reached by training, customer service should improve drastically. As one participant mentioned: "A person should be appointed on merit, no matter what creed or colour, so that the work can be done and the service delivered, because we serve the community". However the participants also experience that customer service is deteriorating as a result of misunderstandings between different cultural groups. As one participant mentioned: "weens kultuur verskille is daar baie misverstande in die werksomstandighede. Ons verstaan mekaar nie en dit het weer 'n effek op die werk wat gedoen moet word".

- **Theme 9: Power game (Ranking=13)**

This theme was mentioned by 2 participants. It appears that South Africa is in the process of making the same mistakes as other countries in focusing on the power game. Black employees, in particular, seem to be actively recruited, placed in senior positions and given the related finishing. In other words top management are using their 'power' to enforce Affirmative Action upon employees (Ruthven, 2000). This makes white employees very insecure as some responses

included: “The vision of top management is that you were on top but now we are on top so now we enforce our world” and “A power game is in process. White men feel they are being suppressed and they fear losing their jobs, therefore they also manipulate others”.

In order for Employment Equity programmes to work, commitment among top and senior managers is necessary. Managers not only need to commit themselves to the implementation thereof but also understand the value of the whole process of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action is no ‘quick fix’, where workers are only used in a power struggle.

- **Theme 16: Loss of expertise (Ranking=13)**

This theme was mentioned by 2 participants. Experienced managerial employees are in short supply in South Africa (Baron, 2004). White employees, employed by the old apartheid system, feel alienated and/or marginalised in the new Affirmative Action process, and are therefore leaving organisations (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). As one participant mentioned: “Many white men got tired of the system and have resigned. Expertise has gone lost, whilst they could have been used to train others. I would say that a position that has been identified as an Affirmative Action position should have been given a bridging period of 2 years. If a white person is employed in the position, for instance, he could have been given an Affirmative Action candidate to train” and “Expertise has gone lost and the employees who stayed behind turned negative as a result”.

Further more if unsuitable qualified people with no potential are appointed to positions, loss of expertise will be sure to occur (Leopeng, 1999). New appointments should be linked to relevant training for the appointees, no matter who they are. Qunta (1995) argues that if people believe that Affirmative Action has nothing to do with appointing unqualified people, then the fears of those who are genuinely concerned about maintaining standards will be shown to be unfounded. It is possible that people might rather need further training in certain areas, which will require an upgrade in their basic skills and a development of their potential (Qunta, 1995).

- **Theme 12: Corruption (Ranking=16)**

This theme was mentioned by 1 participant. It must be stressed that Affirmative Action will be considered unfair and discriminatory if an Affirmative Action appointee from in- or outside an organisation is given a position at all costs without granting other suitable qualified persons the opportunity to compete (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Affirmative Action is not about giving away opportunities; it is about reducing some of the risk, responsibility and accountability that previously rested (dominantly taken or conveniently given) upon the shoulders of the white male (Baron, 2004).

There are also those who want to abuse the system or maybe have a wrong understanding of the system. Corruption coming from top management tends to make employees negative, as one participant mentioned: "There is corruption as a result of Affirmative Action in the sense that 'we look after one another'. If you have a 'buddy' things will be much easier for you".

DISCUSSION

Following the transformation process in 1994, the South African Constitution guaranteed that all citizens are equal before the law (Stacey, 2003). This created the path for the implementation of Affirmative Action and Employment Equity interventions in helping to redress past inequalities. Although these interventions were implemented with much enthusiasm, incidents reflecting prejudice still occur (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999).

Public administrators as well as politicians are under tremendous pressure as heavy demands regarding implementation of these interventions are being placed on them. The public sector is seen as a non-party-political organisation, and as an administrative arm of the government has been given the opportunity to help focus on correcting inequality in the workplace (Nel, 2000). Although Affirmative Action programmes were implemented to redress past inequalities it seems that organisations are focusing on the numbers game while implementing their programmes (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). Black employees, in particular, seem to be actively recruited, placed in senior positions and given the related finishing. To pass over the best-qualified

candidate to choose a lesser-qualified candidate from a designated group dismisses the merit principle – that which public organisations still try to maintain – and replaces it with the quota system (Ruthven, 2000).

Charlton and Van Niekerk (1994) warn that Affirmative Action, as was the case with apartheid, perpetuates racial discrimination and exacerbates tensions. In order to be able to benefit black employees through the use of quotas, the government have to deny opportunities for white employees (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). The Employment Equity Act (no. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998) specifically excludes the setting of quotas as a means of achieving equitable representation of suitably qualified people from previously disadvantaged groups in the workplace. However this seems not to be the case from the interviews conducted in a public organisation in that some of the participants experienced that incompetent appointments are made just to fill certain quotas.

On the other hand organisations have dissatisfied black employees, since it appear that they have been placed in meaningless positions or have no hope of making a success of the required functions or tasks (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Such individuals then increasingly feel negatively stigmatised as unqualified or incompetent if hired on the basis of Affirmative Action. This can be resolved if competence and job requirements are clearly defined. The potential of a prospective candidate to achieve an expected standard within a reasonable time must be considered (Thomas, 1997). Some of the results indicated that Affirmative Action appointees are misused, that training and sufficient succession planning is a problem and that feelings of negativity are present with regards to Affirmative Action.

Although organisations are trying to create better opportunities for Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people, preferential hiring tends to create resistance among employees due to perceived injustice (Ruthven, 2000). The view that Affirmative Action involves preferential hiring and treatment based on group membership creates resistance to its implementation and original purpose (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). The reason for this resistance might be linked to the fact that people still perceive discrimination and injustice in the workplace (Ruthven, 2000). One of the responses that were widely identified

through the interviews is that appointments should be based on merit and on suitable qualifications. It appears that white employees felt that standards will drop if black unsuitable qualified people with no potential are appointed to positions and that work load increases as these employees can not successfully fulfil their tasks. Not only do employees feel that quality is being affected, but that productivity also seems to be a problem due to a lack of job related knowledge. Discrimination on the grounds of lack of relevant experience alone is considered to be unfair discrimination (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). Results also indicated that reversed discrimination is present in the organisation and that corruption and the misuse of power, result in the appointment of unsuitably qualified individuals.

It therefore appears that little progress has been made regarding equal opportunities in organisations due to the fact that such a strategy often implies a painful change in the structure, culture and operations of the organisation (Rheem, 1996). The reason for this is that change raises fears in people's minds regarding declining standards, token appointments, the end of merit as the basis for promotion and advancement, and a rapid decline in the economy of South Africa (De Jong & Visser, 2000). These fears mostly emanate from white people and are reinforced when black people are appointed to senior positions in response to the Employment Equity legislation (No.55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998). It seems from employee responses that predominantly white employees tend to be ambivalent towards Affirmative Action. Part of the reason for this ambivalence is the fear of change, especially when that change involves a radical re-thinking of past strategies (De Jong & Visser, 2000). White employees, employed by the old apartheid system, feel alienated and/or marginalised in the new Affirmative Action process and are therefore also leaving organisations (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). This leads to loss of expertise occurring in organisations and feelings of job insecurity. Though organisations show a considerable amount of improvement on relationships between black and white, discrimination still seems to present itself through the implementation of Affirmative Action (Ruthven, 2000), especially in terms of cultural differences. Managing diversity is crucial for the effective management and development of people. It is important to not only focus on cultural differences but also concentrate on individual needs and perceptions (Den Hartog & Verburg, 2004).

Unfortunately, it appears that South Africa is also in the process of making the same mistakes as other countries in the misuse of power. Black employees in particular, are being placed in senior positions without neither the correct qualifications nor job related experience because they know somebody in the organisation or due to a power game to get the correct numbers in the organisation. In other words it appears that top management are using their 'power' to enforce Affirmative Action (Ruthven, 2000). In order to address these issues, proper policies and strategies are required to ensure the successful and correct application of Affirmative Action in the organisation. Furthermore organisations need to address the true objective of Affirmative Action in order to ensure equity (i.e. a principle of fairness and recognising differences) instead of only focusing on a process of equality (i.e. a principle of sameness and ignorance of differences) in the organisation (Davidson & Fielden, 2003).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Senior Management in public organisations needs first to understand the prevailing culture in the organisation before embarking on measures such as Affirmative Action. To achieve an understanding of the prevailing status of the organisation, synergy between employee goals and those of the organisation are needed, as well as higher levels of motivation, credibility and a relationship between employees at all levels (Wingrove, 1994). It seems that the public organisation makes the mistake of viewing Affirmative Action as an additional policy rather than as a total organisational development intervention which evaluates, and often changes, the way in which people are recruited, selected, trained, developed, promoted and retained (Mason, 1997).

The public organisation does seem to be geared towards overall change, but still needs to work towards cultural change. Resistance to change was identified as one of the factors inhibiting the successful implementation of Affirmative Action. Robbins (1993) suggests six tactics for managers to assist them in successfully implementing Affirmative Action programmes, namely education and communication, participation, facilitation and support, negotiation, manipulation and cooptation and coercion. Still it seems that the public organisation under investigation has implemented some of these tactics with little success (Ruthven, 1999). However, a

comprehensive study needs to be undertaken to measure in which areas the above are lacking and how it can be rectified. The change process in any organisation, including public organisations, should follow certain steps (Robbins, 1993) namely unfreezing the status quo, movement to a new state and refreezing the new change to make it permanent. The situation in the public organisation under investigation appears to be somewhere between that of unfreezing and movement towards a new state.

Development should not be seen simply in terms of providing education and training for the disadvantaged (Mason, 1997). Development depends on ability but also on motivation and context. Equally important to the process of development are the expectations, prejudices, and people management skills of current managers (Thomas, 1997). Seeing that the most significant development generally takes place 'on the job' rather than as a carry-over from training programmes, it is important that context, in the form of managerial prejudice and motivation to develop subordinates, is addressed. The development of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people should be part of the general development of people within an organisation. Once in the organisation, Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people should be promoted according to workforce, succession, and career plans, which takes the backlogs of previously disadvantaged groups in specific positions into account. A check should be kept, however, on the numbers of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people being provided with promotion opportunities. Special training opportunities should be provided where numbers fall short of acceptable targets (Mason, 1997).

A limitation experienced in this research was that respondents felt uncomfortable talking about how they experienced Affirmative Action for fear of being exposed. Although interviews were held in confidentiality, respondents still mistrusted the interviewer's intentions. This led to some of the responses being overly positive or overly negative regarding equal opportunities. Respondents were also from different sections in the public organisation, which could have resulted in different circumstances and experiences in their departments and could possibly have affected findings.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide conclusions regarding the results of the empirical study of the research article. Conclusions are drawn with regard to the research objectives. Furthermore, limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for the industry are made, and research opportunities that emanate from this research are presented.

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this research was to determine how employees working in a public organisation experience Affirmative Action. The following conclusions can be made from this study:

With the enforcement of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998), the government laid the basis for Affirmative Action in employment law and the implementation thereof in organisations (Human, 1997). The Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) (South Africa, 1998) states that employment equity involves both the elimination of unfair discrimination and the establishment of specific measures to accelerate the advancement of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people (Stacey, 2003). One of the measures to accelerate the advancement of these designated groups is Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action conceptualised from the literature includes specific plans and efforts along with preferential treatment in appointments and promotions. As such, Affirmative Action is part of the process of Employment Equity, which includes a broader range of activities (Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999).

Affirmative Action as an example of different treatment, is consistent with the ideal of equality to the extent that it eliminates the disadvantages of an unequal distribution of resources (Agocs & Burr, 1996). Although organisations between 1960 and 1990 concentrated on treating people equally, where differences were ignored and the focus were more on the 'sameness' between

individuals, organisations however still lack the component of equity. Equity are recognised when people are treated equitable and differences are recognised, involving the principle of fairness (Davidson & Fielden, 2003). From the differences between equality and equity it is believed that Affirmative Action should be implemented to ensure equity in organisations. Since the progress of South Africa to a democracy, many organisations have been attempting to introduce this concept of equity into their policies (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). However, very few organisations act neutral about implementing equity. Those who are opposed to Affirmative Action condemn it as window-dressing, the fulfilment of quotas, and as a numbers game (Human, et al., 1999; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999), and in some circumstances as a bigger focus on equality instead of equity.

A positive outcome of a properly implemented Affirmative Action programme, according to the literature, can be the better management of human resources and a rise in standards (Human, et al., 1999). Although Affirmative Action programmes create opportunities for Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people, the experience of Affirmative Action in the workplace along with the realistic view that it involves preferential hiring and treatment based on group membership, creates tremendous resistance as a result of perceived injustice (De Jong & Visser, 2000). Very little has been done to dispel the fears of whites or to prepare organisational culture for changes. Misperceptions of Affirmative Action programmes seem to be more prevalent in organisations of which the management structures have previously been dominated by white males (Weiner, 1993). This is due to the fact that attempts to implement Affirmative Action programmes have failed as a result of resistance from both white and black corps, unrealistic expectations of Affirmative Action candidates, an overall resistance to change, a lack or insufficient training and development of Affirmative Action candidates, and certain behavioural characteristics of some personnel trying to sabotage good relations (Weiner, 1993).

The experience of Affirmative Action in the workplace does not seem to be any different than from literature. Laws in the private sector that explicitly disadvantaged black employees and promoted white employees in the past, were opposed to previous and current public service acts, where apparently no racial connotations exist (Reddy & Choudree, 1996). Given the high

unemployment rate among and the long history of discrimination against black employees, the public services has been trying to create opportunities to redress the past by employing black employees rather than focusing on employing white employees only (Nel, 2000). Public organisations in a post-apartheid South Africa could play a pivotal role in creating a reconciliatory and development friendly environment through the effective and efficient implementation of policies, such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and Diversity Management.

Still public organisations, especially with specific reference to leadership, are also challenged by the old apartheid traditions and the demands of adjusting to new demands of a non-racial society (Meyerson, 1999). Behaviour that is dysfunctional and ineffective, emanating from black employees, is rather a reflection of the discomfort and anxiety still experienced in the predominantly white work setting than a reflection of one's basic competence (Meyerson, 1999). However, despite improvements in race relations in the past twenty years, incidents reflecting prejudice still occur (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). This seems true even though the public organisation has taken a positive stance regarding racial integration of the workplace, through the sincere and comprehensive implementation of Equal Employment and Affirmative Action programmes.

A common error some organisations are making is to appoint a person in an Affirmative Action position, or impose this appointment on the company, merely to meet a goal. Amongst themselves, the white employees feel that the black employees are simply window-dressing and that standards are being lowered. Many black employees are frustrated and feel that their talents and potential are underutilised. One of the responses that were widely identified through the interviews is that appointments should be based on merit. It appears that white employees felt that standards will drop if black unsuitable qualified people with no potential are appointed to positions. Not only do employees feel that quality is being affected, but that productivity also seems to be a problem due to a lack of job related knowledge.

Some of the interviews revealed that Affirmative Action also lead to white males feeling marginalised and alienated, because all the attention is now only directed at improving the

positions of the previously disadvantaged members. Organisations feel that they need to act politically correct, even though black employees still feel discriminated against and many white men fear and resent the intrusion of blacks (Human, et al., 1999). White employees felt that Affirmative Action just resulted in a process of reversed discrimination.

Top management also seem to misuse their power when an Affirmative Action appointee from in- or outside the organisation is given a position at all costs without granting other suitable qualified persons the opportunity to compete. Some of the respondents of previously disadvantaged groups felt that they had been appointed because of Employment Equity legislation and not because of their ability. However, there appear to be no 'quick fix'. Commitment entails the hands-on involvement of top and senior managers in the implementation of employment equity programmes, as well as the strict monitoring and frequent evaluation of such programmes. Proactive involvement with employees is necessary.

Affirmative Action lies in the ability to understand and accept cultural differences and not to force people to change and live in a new cultural setting (De Jong & Visser, 2000). It is responsible for bringing people from previously disadvantaged groups into the work environment through recruitment and promotion, depending on their ability and potential. Affirmative Action is not about fads, morals, levelling playing fields or moving goalposts (Jankowitz, 1995). It is about developing a growth strategy that will result in organisations becoming world class and more competitive through the investment in their human capital (Jankowitz, 1995).

Other experiences of Affirmative Action in a public organisation included the appointment of incompetent people and an increase in work load due to these appointments, a lack of training and insufficient planning processes, job insecurity, the impact of politics and legislation in the implementation of Affirmative Action, poorer customer service, a lack of discipline and policy and strategy problems. Overall employees experience Affirmative action as negative with a lot of unresolved issues.

3.2 LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this study was that the respondents felt uncomfortable about the presence of the tape-recorder. Confidentiality was assured, but the respondents still did not feel at ease when they were being recorded. It is only after they had discussed it with their co-workers, that most of the respondents gave their cooperation.

Almost all managers agreed to Affirmative Action being implemented and that all employees should have equal opportunities. This response is only natural, because their jobs are on the line. This could also have influenced some of the results.

Many of the participants did not have sufficient opportunity and time to give their full attention to the interview. Co-workers constantly interrupted respondents, which had an affect on the flow of the interview. The only room to our disposal was a table close to the tearoom where employees gathered. This jeopardised the attention of the respondents.

Respondents were also from different sections in the public organisation, which could have resulted in different circumstances and experiences in their departments with regards to the implementation and application of Affirmative Action. This could possibly have affected findings.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations pertaining to the specific industry used in this study, as well as recommendations for future research, are made in the subsequent section.

3.3.1 Recommendations to the organisation

Affirmative Action is an exceptionally sensitive and emotive issue, and public organisations need to be extremely careful when addressing the topic. Senior Management at public organisations need to understand the prevailing culture in the organisation before embarking on

measures such as Affirmative Action. Wingrove (1994) recommends that synergy between employee goals and those of the organisation, levels of motivation, credibility and relationship between employees at all levels and employees' views of the organisation and management can help to achieve an understanding of the prevailing status of the organisation. It seems that the public organisation view Affirmative Action as an additional policy rather than as a total organisational development intervention which evaluates, and often changes, the way in which people are recruited, selected, trained, developed, promoted and retained.

In the public organisation, workshops, seminars and courses with the view to equip employees with the tools to cope with the process of change should be pursued. When they currently do take place, they are not centralised or well co-ordinated. This needs to be addressed. The public organisation seem to be geared towards overall change but still needs to work on cultural change. Resistance to change was identified as one of the factors inhibiting the successful implementations of Affirmative Action. Robbins (1993) suggests six tactics for managers to successfully change the resistance to change: education and communication, participation, facilitation and support, negotiation, manipulation and cooptation, and coercion. However, it appears from the results that the public organisation has implemented some of these tactics with little success. A comprehensive study needs therefore to be undertaken to measure the areas in which these tactics are lacking and to find processes to rectify the situation. The change process in any organisation, including the public organisation, should therefore follow certain steps for successful change (Robbins, 1993), namely the unfreezing of the status quo, moving to a new state, and refreezing the new change to make it permanent. The situation in the public organisation appear to be somewhere between a stage of unfreezing and a stage of moving towards a new state.

Development should not be seen simply in terms of providing education and training for the disadvantaged. Development depends on ability but also on motivation and context. Equally important to the process of development are the expectations, prejudices, and people management skills of current managers. As the most significant development generally takes place 'on the job' rather than as a carry-over from training programmes, it is important that context, in the form of managerial prejudice and motivation to develop subordinates, is

addressed. The development of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people should be part of the general development of people within an organisation. Once in the organisation, the previously disadvantaged should be promoted according to workforce, succession, and career plans which take the backlogs of Black, Asian and Coloured males and females, White females and disabled people in specific positions into account. A check should be kept, however, on the numbers of previously disadvantaged people being provided with promotion opportunities. Special training opportunities should be provided where numbers fall short of acceptable targets.

Affirmative Action is a very sensitive and emotive issue, and organisations need to be extremely careful when introducing the topic. Organisations need to understand the prevailing culture in the organisation before embarking on measures such as Affirmative Action. It is important and in the best interest of organisation to prepare their workforce by attending to prejudices and personal fears about Affirmative Action before implementation. The irony of this restraint is that the more prejudices, myths, and conflicting interests about Affirmative Action are left unattended; the more the constraint closes up.

3.3.2 Recommendations for future research

Research could be done concerning the impact of Affirmative Action in different public organisations. Perceptions of employees about Affirmative Action in private organisations can also be compared with those in parastatals.

Based on the findings of this research, a study needs to be conducted to determine the impact of diverging views between black and white employees on productivity in the public organisation as a result of Affirmative Action. Such a study can also include long-term productivity measurement in public organisations once Affirmative Action has been successfully implemented. Research can also explore stereotypes about other races regarding their productivity and Affirmative Action.

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