

**The experiences of designated employees in a predominantly white consulting business unit.**

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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 (5<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA) were followed in this mini-dissertation. This practice is in line with the policy of the Industrial Psychology Programme of the North-West University.
- This mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article.

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

*For without Him nothing is possible*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Title:** The experiences of designated employees in a predominantly white consulting business unit.

**Key terms:** Designated employee, diversity management, organisational culture, organisational climate, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

In the past fourteen years, South African business has experienced a period of significant transformation. The absorption of previously disadvantaged employees into higher skilled jobs is being nudged by measures such as employment equity legislation and affirmative action. Even though previously excluded racial and ethnic groups are being empowered and incorporated into management structures, overall progress has been slow.

The research organisation seems to be a microcosm of the macro-environment with regard to the advancement of previously disadvantaged employees, consisting primarily of white employees (66%). Designated employees are represented in much smaller numbers: Indian (15%), African (15%) and Coloured (4%). The objective of this research was to gain an understanding of how designated employees experience working in a predominantly white business unit.

Applying a qualitative research design, anecdote circles were used to facilitate the informal sharing of experiences amongst peers. Twelve individuals partook in the anecdote circles and 59 anecdotes were gathered. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to extract themes.

Thirty-two themes were identified in the anecdotes that were grouped into seven super-ordinate themes: A debilitating organisational culture; A constructive work environment; Poor orientation and integration into the business unit; Demanding consultant role; Dissatisfaction with careers; Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile and Involved management style.

Results indicate that designated employees find the organisational culture restrictive due to the bureaucratic nature of the organisation, the insensitivity towards cultural differences, the

impersonal atmosphere in the organisation; the excessive use of acronyms; poor communication and ineffective support structures.

In contrast they have a positive view of their work environment which is seen as flexible, with plenty opportunities for development and high standards of work. Good teamwork exists with designated employees receiving a lot of support from their project team members.

Results show that designated employees experience poor orientation in the business unit, which results in a lack of knowledge regarding processes, tools, and ideal behaviour. They are left to find this information out for themselves and this leads to poor integration into the business unit.

Designated employees find their role as consultant very demanding. They experience a lot of pressure on projects and are concerned about others' impression of them. They feel empowered in certain areas of their work life and enjoy taking responsibility for their work and development.

Designated employees are dissatisfied with the direction that their careers are taking and feel frustrated by the lack of career advancement. They do not believe their managers have the power to address their concerns regarding their career. Furthermore they equate career progression with financial gain and this adds to their frustration regarding their careers.

Designated employees are struggling to deal with difficult and demanding clients who neglect responsibilities and can be unreasonable. They admit that they are not sure how to handle these clients.

Designated employees are satisfied with the level of interaction with their managers and the recognition they receive when a job is well done. Some indicate that they would prefer more guidance and support from their managers and they stress the importance of performance management and providing regular feedback.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel.** Die ervaringe van aangewese werknemers in 'n oorwegend blanke konsultasie-eenheid.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Aangewese werknemers, diversiteitsbestuur, organisasie kultuur, organisasie klimaat, Interpretierende Fenomenologiese Analiese.

Die sakewêreld in Suid-Afrika het die afgelope veertien jaar deur 'n periode van beduidende transformasie beweeg. Die opname van voorheen benadeelde werknemers in bestuurstrukture en poste wat hoër vaardighede benodig, word aangemoedig deur spesifieke indiensneminggelykheidwetgewing, in die besonder regstellende aksie. Hoewel voorheen benadeelde rasse en etniese groepe al hoe meer bemagtig word, is vooruitgang op hierdie gebied baie stadig.

Die navorsing organisasie weerspieël die makro-omgewing aangaande die voortuitgang van aangewese werknemers, met blanke werknemers in die oorgrote meerderdheid (66%) en aangewese werknemers wat in aansienlik kleiner getalle verteenwoordig word: Indiër werknemers (15%), Swart werknemers (15%) en Kleurling werknemers (4%). Die doel van hierdie navorsing is om 'n begrip te vorm van hoe aangewese werknemers dit ervaar om in 'n oorwegend blanke konsultasie-eenheid te werk.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is aangewend en staaltjiesirkels is gebruik om die deel van ervarings te fasiliteer. Twaalf individue het deelgeneem aan die sirkels en 59 staaltjies is gegenereer. Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analiese is gebruik om temas te identifiseer.

Twee en dertig temas, gegroepeer in sewe oorhoofse temas, is geïdentifiseer: 'n Aftakelende organisasie kultuur; 'n Konstruktiewe werksomgewing; Swak oriëntasie en integrasie in besigheids-eenheid; Veeleisende konsultant rol; Loopbaan ontevredenheid; Gevoel van ontoereikendheid in hantering van tipiese veeleisende kliente; en 'n Betrokke bestuurstyl.

Aangewese werknemers vind die organisasie kultuur beperkend as gevolg van die burokratiese aard van die organisasie, die kultuur onsensitieweiteit, die onpersoonlike atmosfeer, die oormatige gebruik van afkortings, swak kommunikasie en oneffektiewe ondersteuningstelsels.

In kontras blyk dit dat aangewese werknemers 'n positiewe siening het van hul werksomgewing. Hul sien dit as buigsaam, met goeie geleenthede vir ontwikkeling en hoë werkstandaarde. Goeie spanwerk bestaan en aangewese werknemers ontvang baie ondersteuning van hul projekspan.

Aangewese werknemers voel onvoldoende oriëntasie vind plaas in die besigheids-eenheid en dit lei tot 'n tekort aan kennis aangaande die prosesse, stelsels en gewenste gedrag binne die werksomgewing. Dit word aan aangewese werknemers oorgelaat om self hierdie belangrike aspekte te bemagtig en veroorsaak swak integrasie in die besigheids-eenheid.

Aangewese werknemers vind die rol as konsultant baie veeleisend. Hul ervaar baie spanning en is ingestel op die indruk wat hul op ander maak. Hul voel bemagtig in sekere areas van hul werkslewe en geniet die verantwoordelikheid wat hul dra aangaande hul werk en persoonlike ontwikkeling.

Aangewese werknemers is ongelukkig met die rigting waarin hul loopbane ontwikkel en is gefrustreerd met die feit dat hul nie bevordering ontvang nie. Hul voel hul bestuurders het nie die invloed om hul griewe aangaande hul loopbane aan te spreek nie. Hul dui ook daarop dat bevordering gepaard gaan met finansiële voortuitgang en dit dra by tot hul frustrasie.

Aangewese werknemers vind dit baie moeilik om die veeleisende en moeilike kliente wat hul teëkom te hanteer. Hul erken dat hul nie weet hoe om hierdie kliente te benader nie.

Aangewese werknemers is tevrede met die interaksie wat hul met hul bestuurders het en die erkenning wat hul ontvang wanneer hul goeie werk verrig. Sommige werknemers dui aan dat hul meer ondersteuning en leiding van hul bestuurders verwag en hul benadruk die belangrikheid van terugvoer in die werksomgewing.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This mini-dissertation deals with the experience of designated employees in a predominantly white consulting business unit. Chapter 1 focuses on the problem statement, objectives of the research and the research methods are defined. Chapter divisions are also laid out.

#### **1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

South Africa is a country of intense social diversity, defined primarily around race, nationality, language, class and religion (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). Many of the inequalities created and maintained by Apartheid, seem to have remained in the South African workplace. Various nationwide surveys have proved that race relations in the private sector have not adequately improved (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2006; Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006) despite positional empowerment of previously disadvantaged employees enforced through legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and Affirmative Action. Thomas (1996) emphasises that organisations on the surface appear to be promoting quality, yet they do not address critical issues such as organisational culture and climate, which are critical to the success of affirmative action and employment equity strategies. As such, managing diversity has been introduced as a holistic business strategy to create an organisational culture that will foster the advancement and integration of designated employees (Mavin & Girling, 2000; Van Vuuren, 2008). One of the principals underlying the managing diversity approach relates to establishing an organisational culture that is conducive to the integration of designated employees in the workforce and one that will manifest in a positive inter-racial working climate.

The research organisation seems to be a microcosm of the macro-environment with regard to the advancement of previously disadvantaged employees and the creation of a more diverse work team. Being a multinational firm, the research organisation proclaims a very progressive approach to promoting diversity, yet positive effects in this regard are not reflected in their South African consulting business unit. Here designated employees are distinctly in the minority and

white males fill all the executive positions. Moreover, despite efforts to appoint employees from designated groups, turnover amongst designated employees is particularly high.

In light of relevant theory pointing to the necessary foundation of an organisational culture and climate conducive to diversity, the question arises whether aspects of the organisational culture and climate within the business unit may potentially hinder the retention of designated employees. The objective of the research was therefore to explore aspects of organisational culture and climate, in particular as experienced by designated employees in a South African consulting business unit of a Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation.

### **Equality in the South African context**

South Africa has one of the most unequal income distribution patterns in the world and poverty is still largely defined by skin colour, with Black people making up around 90% of the country's poor (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). While there has been a significant and rapid advance of Africans into and within the middle income group, the reality is that only 7.8% of Africans belong to this group, while 15.6% of this group are Coloured, 20.7% are Indian and 33% are White (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey<sup>1</sup> reports 30% of respondents cited income inequality as the greatest challenge to race relations and the creation of a more unified society (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2006).

For trust to develop between the different races in South Africa, informal inter-racial socialisation has to occur, yet the progress we are making in this regard is slow. The South African Social Attitudes Survey, conducted between August and October 2003, showed that there were improvements in perceptions of race relations: a total of 57% of the respondents felt that race relations had improved, 29% felt that they had remained the same and 14% felt that they had become worse. In the 2003 survey, Coloureds (61%), followed by Africans (59%), Indians (58%) and Whites (42%) reported improved race relations (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey is an annual survey, which measures responses of the South African public to socio-political and economic change with particular emphasis of their impact on national reconciliation.

According to information from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2006) informal inter-racial interaction amongst South Africans remains infrequent and largely limited to the higher income categories. The low desire to increase cross-racial contact and communication creates a parallel, as opposed to integrated, coexistence and provides the context within which the fear of the unknown thrives, which in turn creates a breeding ground for negative stereotypes.

Although results from the South African Social Attitudes Survey report that educational institutions and government departments have shown improved race relations, workplaces however, reveal one of the highest ratios of experience of racial discrimination. These results raise the question whether racism is being left to fester in the private sector (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006).

In the past 14 years since the Government of National Unity came into power, South African business has gone through a period of significant transformation. Previously excluded racial and ethnic groups are being both empowered and incorporated into management structures (Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). At the level of ownership and control of wealth, the proportion of senior management who are Black increased by 8.4% between 2000 and 2004; while for Whites a decrease of 8.6% was recorded over the same period (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). See Table 1.

TABLE 1  
CHANGE IN TOP MANAGEMENT ACCORDING TO RACE FROM 2000 - 2004

| Group                       | 2000 (%) | 2002 (%) | 2004 (%) | Total % point change |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| <i>Blacks (Accumulated)</i> | 12.7     | 18.4     | 21.1     | 8.4                  |
| Whites                      | 87.5     | 81.5     | 78.9     | -8.6                 |
| Africans                    | 6.2      | 10.0     | 11.8     | 5.6                  |
| Coloureds                   | 2.7      | 3.4      | 3.7      | 1.0                  |
| Indians                     | 3.8      | 5.0      | 5.6      | 1.8                  |

Overall, progress into skilled and managerial work has, however, been slow. The legacy of apartheid resulted in structural inequalities in the acquisition of education, work, skill and access to managerial, professional and occupational positions and would not be completely eliminated in a short period of time (Horwitz, Browning, Jain & Steenkamp, 2002).

The absorption of previously disadvantaged individuals into higher skilled and managerial jobs is being nudged by measures such as employment equity legislation and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). Employment equity involves both the elimination of unfair discrimination and the establishment of specific measures to accelerate the advancement of Blacks, women and the disabled. One of the measures to accelerate the advancement of these designated groups is affirmative action which involves 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 (Employment Equity Act, 1998; Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999). Affirmative action programmes have increasingly been criticised for being racist, elitist and for having very few positive results (De Beer & Radley, 2000). Fears exist that too much emphasis is placed on meeting employment targets without taking cognisance of whether the beneficiaries are capable of doing the work required. Another disadvantage of affirmative action is that it stigmatises the beneficiaries. Employees who benefit from affirmative action bear a mark of not being the best choice and this could impact on the individual's performance and self-esteem. There are many who argue that affirmative action uses reverse discrimination to solve the problem of discrimination and this approach can actually incite racism as opposed to decrease racism. Some are of the opinion that it favours a small group of Blacks who possess the required qualifications and experience while it is those who are wholly unqualified that are most in need of preferential treatment (Herholdt & Marx, 1999; Motileng, 2005; Thomas, 1996). While affirmative action help mitigates the historical effects of institutionalised racism by adjusting the diversity profile of organisations to better reflect the demography of the country's population, it has little impact on the career development and upward mobility of affirmative action candidates within the organisation (Leonard, 1990). Managing diversity has been proposed as a holistic management strategy to address the problems experienced with affirmative action policies.

## **Managing diversity**

Managing diversity can be defined as a planned, systematic and comprehensive managerial process for developing an organisational environment in which all employees, with their similarities and differences, can contribute to the strategic and competitive advantage of the organisation, and where no-one is excluded on the basis of factors unrelated to productivity (Thomas, 1996). Embarking on a diversity management process allows organisations to: tap into a range of skills not previously available in an organisation characterised by a homogeneous workforce; utilise all people to the maximum; promote organisational flexibility and attract and retain the best talent. Diverse populations have different experiences, insights, values and approaches to workplace issues resulting in different perspectives as well as alternative and creative solutions to work-related problems (Cox & Blake, 1991; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001; Spataro, 2005; Thomas, 1996; Wilson, 1994).

The potential benefits of managing diversity are substantial but not automatic; the process of creating and capitalising on diversity must therefore be carefully managed. Contextual factors within organisations have been shown to affect reactions to diversity. Organisational culture is one such contextual factor that can address questions of salience, values and reactions to diversity (Ely & Thomas, 2001; McEnrue, 1993).

## **Organisational culture**

Organisational culture guides the definition of diversity in any given environment. It will determine the extent to which members emphasise or de-emphasise differences between individuals and it prescribes the appropriateness of different behaviours, therefore influencing the social interaction between members of majority and minority groups. Organisational culture will also determine how diversity initiatives will be adopted within the organisation (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996; Spataro, 2005). In essence the norms and values that comprise an organisational culture will aid or complicate the integration of employees who are diverse from the main group (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996). To effectively manage diversity, an organisation needs to develop a culture which represents values, beliefs, norms and attitudes that support the advancement of diversity employees (Barnard, 1993; Kersten, 2000).

Organisational culture can be defined as the set of shared, implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about and reacts to its various environments (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). Schein (as cited in Barnard, 1993) defines organisational culture as the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems. Organisational culture is a multi-dimensional concept that can be seen as something which may be influenced, changed and manipulated and in turn influence, change and manipulate members and features of the organisation (Kilbourne, 1991; Smircich, 1983; Weeks, 1988). It fulfils four functions within an organisation: it gives members an organisational identity; it facilitates collective commitment; it promotes social system stability and serves as a sense-making and control mechanism that guides and shapes the attitudes and behaviour of employees. This last function is of particular importance when reviewing diversity within an organisation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Schultz, Bagraim, Potgieter, Viedge, & Werner, 2003).

Organisational culture operates at two different levels. At a visible level, culture is represented in artifacts, which consist of the physical manifestations of an organisation's culture. Examples include acronyms, awards and so forth. At a less visible level culture reflects the values and beliefs shared among organisational members. Organisational values are concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states that transcend situations and guide the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events. Values are the foundation of culture and tend to persist over time, being more resistant to change. Espoused values represent the stated values and norms that are preferred by the organisation. Enacted values on the other hand represent values and norms that are actually exhibited by employees (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

The values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which employees bring into the organisation are shaped by those prevailing in the individual's society at large and often form the basis for decisions and choices at work. According to Thomas and Bendixen (2000), it is therefore critical to gain an understanding of the values that people from different ethnic backgrounds bring into their places of employment. Values contain a judgemental element in that they carry an

individual's ideas as to what is right, good or desirable (Beugré & Offodile, 2001; Robbins, 1998). People from different cultures and backgrounds vary in terms of their values, attitudes and beliefs. In a culturally diverse workplace, these differences affect work behaviour in a variety of ways (Ritvo, Litwin & Butler, 1995). The congruence between an individual's values and the organisation's values is significantly associated with organisational commitment, job satisfaction, intention to quit and turnover (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

Hofstede identified four dimensions in which national cultures differ:

- Power Distance indicates how power is distributed within the culture. A high power distance is reflected in more levels of hierarchy and centralised decision making, while a low power distance is reflected in cultures that emphasise networking and collaboration.
- Uncertainty Avoidance represents the extent to which uncertainty is found uncomfortable; the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance rely on formal rules and procedures to control events and create security. Such cultures avoid taking risks.
- Individualism / Collectivism represents the extent to which people prefer to make their own decisions and stay emotionally independent versus the extent to which they prefer to belong to strong, cohesive wider in-groups.
- Masculinity / Femininity reveals the preference for masculine values of assertiveness, competitiveness and materialism versus preference for values such as nurturing and supportiveness (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, 2001; Schultz et al., 2003).

These dimensions are not separate, they interact with each other to define and impact culture. The study conducted by Hofstede has been corroborated by a number of other researchers over the years. The dimensions identified by Hofstede can therefore be used as a theoretical basis from which to manage cultural diversity in an organisation (Reyneke, 2006).

Harrison and Stokes (1992) developed a typology of organisational culture that divides it into four dimensions, namely role, power, performance and supportive cultures. These typologies occur in organisations in combination with one another and each is based on its own values, patterns of behaviour, methods of decision-making and motivating employees and typical management style. The dimensions are described as follows:

- Power culture is a culture characterised by authority and hierarchy with unequal access to resources. People in power positions use resources to satisfy or frustrate other people and leadership is based on paternalism and justice. Managers are often power hungry and rule by fear. Employees are in conflict with one another to gain more power and internal politics are prevalent. Leaders adopt a view that they are obliged to their sub-ordinates and with loyal employees they are strict though fair (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).
- Role culture is a culture characterised by bureaucracy where individuals rely on stability and predictability. Predictability is seen as more important than skills and function is more important than the individual. The values underlying the role culture are administrative order, dependence, rationality and consistency. Formal lines of communication quickly become overloaded and this difficulty in handling information makes the organisation slow to adapt to environmental changes. Employees are managed as though they cannot be relied upon and autonomy, discretion and initiative are restricted activities within the rules (Estienne, 1997; Harrison & Stokes, 1992).
- Performance culture is typified by employees with a high degree of commitment and personal satisfaction who take a positive view of a performance-oriented culture. Employees manage themselves because they believe they work for something larger than themselves and their morale is high. They have a sense of urgency, understand and support the values, and errors are viewed as a learning experience. Employees in a performance culture are in support of a common vision and find reward in their work. Communication channels are open and are not restricted to positional power. Employees on lower levels are empowered to make decisions and leadership is based on knowledge and skills (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).
- Support culture is characterised by reciprocal trust between the individuals and the organisation. Employees believe they are regarded as valuable human beings and good relations are encouraged. In this culture, employees care for one another and they enjoy going to work. They have a positive view of their colleagues, suppliers and clients because they feel that they are being cared for by the organisation. The support culture is typified by a high flow of information, both informal and formal communication. The employees support harmony in the workplace (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).

Organisations are social entities and as a result very complex. An organisation may predominantly reflect one type of culture while at the same time displaying characteristics associated with other types of cultures (Schultz et al., 2003). Every culture is unique and therefore cannot necessarily be defined by only one type of culture; indeed all the mentioned types can be integrated into an organisational culture (Nixon, 1987; Weeks, 1988).

### **Organisational climate**

Organisational climate can be described as the character of the organisation's internal environment. It refers to employees' perceptions with regards to specific characteristics of their work environment (Bookbinder, 1984; Combrink, 2004; Weeks & Lessing, 1988). Culture and climate are not the same concept. Climate refers to individual perceptions that are short term and can be easily manipulated whereas culture refers to shared beliefs, norms and ideas that are not easy to change and manifest over a longer period (Barnard, 1993). Turnipseed (1988) suggests that organisational climate exists as a sub-set within culture, it influences culture and in return is influenced by culture. An analysis of the organisational climate will provide important information regarding the culture of the organisation, but a deeper analysis of values will lead to a better understanding of organisational behaviour (Bookbinder, 1984).

Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1979) described seven dimensions of organisational climate:

- Conformity - the perception that there are many externally imposed constraints in the organisation. The degree to which members feel that there are many rules, procedures, policies and practices to which they have to conform rather than being able to do their work as they see fit.
- Responsibility - the extent to which members of the organisation are given personal responsibility to achieve their part of the organisation's goals. The degree to which members feel that they can make decisions and solve problems without having to constantly check with superiors.
- Standards - the emphasis the organisation places on quality performance and outstanding production including the degree to which the member feels the organisation is setting challenging goals for itself and communicating these goal commitments to members.

- Rewards - the degree to which members feel that they are being recognised and rewarded for good work rather than being ignored, criticised or punished when something goes wrong.
- Organisational clarity - the feeling among members that things are well-organised and goals are clearly defined rather than being disorderly, confused or chaotic.
- Warmth and support - the perception that friendliness is a valued norm in the organisation; that members trust one another and offer support to one another. The feeling that good relationships prevail in the work environment.
- Leadership - the willingness of organisation members to accept leadership and direction from other qualified individuals. As needs for leadership arise, members feel free to take leadership roles and are rewarded for successful leadership. Leadership is based on expertise. The organisation is not dominated by or dependent on one or two individuals.

### **Contextualising the study: the research organisation**

The Employment Equity Act (1998) defines designated groups as Black people (Africans, Coloureds and Indians), women and people with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, the researcher only focused on African, Coloured and Indian employees working in the consulting business unit of a Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation.

The corporation is the world's largest information technology company spanning across 174 countries. It manufactures and sells computer hardware, software, infrastructure services, hosting services and consulting services in areas ranging from mainframe computers to nanotechnology.

The corporation is culturally diverse, not only in nationality but also in its employee base with regards to race, gender, culture, lifestyle, age, disability and sexual orientation. It has a long history of progressive management when it comes to civil rights and equal employment. It realised that diversity enhances creativity and innovation and that a company needs to reflect the diversity of the talent pool it wants to hire and retain. But it is also about more than expanding the talent pool; the corporation expanded minority markets dramatically by promoting diversity in its own workforce. By deliberately seeking ways to more effectively reach a broader range of customers, it has seen significant bottom-line results (Thomas, 2004).

This progressive approach to diversity does not seem to be reflected in the consulting business unit located in South Africa. Designated employees are distinctly in the minority and white males fill all the executive positions. Table 2 reflects the diversity statistics for the business unit according to grading at the beginning of October 2008 (Band 06 employees are the most junior, while Band D employees are the most senior):

**TABLE 2**  
**DIVERSITY STATISTICS FOR THE BUSINESS UNIT**

| Grading      | African   | Coloured | Indian    | White     |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Band 06      | 9         | 0        | 3         | 4         |
| Band 07      | 4         | 1        | 3         | 8         |
| Band 08      | 4         | 3        | 10        | 33        |
| Band 09      | 0         | 0        | 1         | 17        |
| Band 10      | 0         | 0        | 0         | 7         |
| Band D       | 0         | 0        | 0         | 5         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>74</b> |

Given the diversity profile of the business unit, the question arises: how much do the designated employees identify with the group and feel a part of the culture?

In the last three years, the business unit has actively endeavoured to grow the employee base and more specifically the diversity profile of the business unit. This has proved more difficult than expected because of a shortage of highly experienced skills required for consulting, a lucrative contracting market and costs associated with top candidates. Research shows that in the external labour market skill shortages remain, requiring employees to continue to adjust remuneration policies to attract employees who have the skills. South Africa's chronic skills shortage means that workers at the top end are paid a premium (Bhorat & Cassim, 2004; Horwitz et al., 2002). According to Froneman (2004) recruitment will remain a problem especially as the larger consulting firms compete aggressively for so called "high-potentials". A price war and decreased loyalty of key staff are the expected result.

Recruitment efforts have consistently been outweighed by the attrition rate. In the period January 2005 until March 2007, the business unit has recruited 90 consultants, but during the same period 95 consultants resigned. High staff turnover and skills shortages have significantly impacted on the consulting industry in South Africa. According to Kransdorff (1996) the average South African employee switches employers at least seven times in his/her working lifetime. In the consulting industry, the rate of tenure is even less, with consultants changing employers every 2 to 3 years. Turnover of highly skilled professionals carries an enormous price tag and has an impact with the loss of clients and experience (Theys, 2004).

More specifically, the business unit seems to be unable to hold onto its designated employees. Quarterly reports compiled from seven exit interviews conducted with designated employees leaving the business unit between the period January 2006 and November 2006, revealed that compensation was most often cited as a reason for leaving, followed by lack of career path and better career opportunities, culture and management style. Other reasons cited include lack of support from leadership and a wish to develop more specialised skills. A number of employees reported that they were headhunted. These reasons correspond with the literature in Radloff (2005) which states that designated employees leave companies because they are poached by competitors; for better payment or benefits; for growth and development opportunities and because they do not feel valued or listened to. Organisational factors such as job content and management style and individual factors such as career aspirations and job satisfaction can also influence turnover. Higher turnover can be linked to negative effects of diversity (Kochan et al., 2003). With the changes in workforce demographics, employee mobility and globalisation, holding on to valuable employees is a significant concern for all companies. This is particularly true in developing parts of the world where high economic growth rates, coupled with limited pools of experienced workers, have caused high levels of turnover (Institute for Business Value, 2006).

According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and growth are related to job satisfaction, while extrinsic factors such as company policy and administration, pay and benefits, relationships with

co-workers, supervision and status are associated with dissatisfaction. Factors that lead to job satisfaction are separate and distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Therefore removing dissatisfying characteristics from a job, does not necessarily make the job satisfying or guarantee employee retention (Robbins, 1998).

The diversity profile of the business unit demonstrates that managers are almost exclusively White males. White managers often rely on Western values that are inconsistent with an African approach to management. An African management style (Afrocentricity) encompasses African history, traditions, culture, mythology and value systems. The resulting management philosophy views the corporation as a community and can be summed up by the Ubuntu philosophy, that we are what we are through our interaction with others. This approach stresses supportiveness, sharing and cooperation and is opposed to individualism, competitiveness and unilateral decision making which are more aligned with a Western management style (Geldenhuys, 2006; Schultz et al., 2003).

Given the current diversity profile of the business unit it is clear that the environment is not equitable. Whether the culture in the business unit is not conducive to the upward mobility of designated employees and whether efforts to manage diversity are successful, may be questionable. In order to address such questions, the researcher deemed it useful to explore aspects of the organisational culture and climate from specifically the viewpoint of designated employees. The aim of this research therefore is to explore the experience of designated employees in a consulting business unit within the research organisation.

## **1.2. AIM OF RESEARCH**

The research aim consists of a general objective and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1. General Objective**

The general aim of this research is to explore the experience of designated employees within a predominantly white consulting business unit.

### **1.2.2. Specific Objective**

- To explore the aspects of organisational culture from the viewpoint of designated employees;
- To explore the aspects of organisational climate from the viewpoint of designated employees;
- To explore the efforts of diversity management in the organisation from the viewpoint of designated employees.

## **1.3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method consists of a literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.3.1. Literature review**

In phase 1 a complete literature review regarding the following are obtained:

- Organisational Culture
- Organisational Climate
- Diversity Management
- Racial Interaction
- Racial Equality
- Designated Employees
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Sources have already been obtained from the following databases:

- PsycLIT
- Business Source Premier
- EbscoHOST – Academic Search Premier
- SA Media

### **1.3.2. Empirical study**

Phase two consists of the empirical study and includes the research design, the participants, data gathering and data analysis.

#### **1.3.2.1. Research design**

Mouton (1996) defines a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) a research design is a strategic framework, a plan that guides research activity to ensure that sound conclusions are reached.

### **Research approach**

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the nature of the information required will determine the choice of research approach. In this study the researcher is interested in studying the experience of designated employees as it unfolds in the real-world without manipulation or control, taking into account the context in which participants find themselves and allowing for the phenomena to be described and displayed as they are experienced by designated employees. A qualitative research design was therefore deemed to be most efficient in addressing the research objective (Flick, 1998; Grbich, 2007; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Qualitative research focuses on meaning in context and aims to produce in-depth understandings of social reality rather than quantity of understanding (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Merriam, 1998). It is concerned with understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives, learning how participants make sense of their circumstances, experiences and structure of the world (Greswell, 1994; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

This approach aligns with the exploratory nature and purpose of the study. Given the current demographic profile of the business unit, the struggle to retain designated employees and the importance of effective diversity management as stated in the literature review, the researcher became curious about how designated employees actually experience working in the business unit. Arkava and Lane (1983) and Guy, Edgley, Arafat, and Allen (1987) stipulate that exploratory studies should be undertaken when the researcher is curious about a situation and wishes to understand it better. Exploration is valuable because it breaks new ground and often illuminates a problem. Exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research. They employ an open, flexible and inductive approach as researchers attempt to look for new insights into phenomena (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999;

Wechler, 1981). According to Mouton (1996), exploratory studies usually lead to insight and comprehension, rather than collection of accurate and replicable data.

### **Research methodology**

The researcher is of the opinion that truth can only be known through exploring an individual's experience of a phenomenon. No single reality exists as every individual interprets his/her experiences according to their own perceptions. In this study, importance is therefore attached to the meaning that designated employees attributed to their experiences of reality, their world and their relationships. This view is in line with a phenomenological approach (Kockelmans, 1987). Phenomenology can be described as a method of inquiry based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness. The reality that counts is the reality each participant comes to know and the experience of the participant becomes the research object (Marton, 1994; Meister & Nolan, 2001; phenomenology, n.d.). In its pure form, phenomenological research seeks mainly to describe, rather than to explain (Lester, 1999). The method of phenomenology involves prolonged interaction with a selected number of individuals in order to access patterns, themes and relationships of meaning of a particular phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1975).

#### **1.3.2.2.Participants**

The unit of analysis in this study is the group of designated employees working in the business unit. A non-probability convenience sample of designated employees was used to reach the objectives of this research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) define non-probability samples as a range of sampling strategies used in qualitative research where units are selected to reflect particular features of a group. These samples are not intended to be statistically representative, but instead the characteristics of the population are used as the basis of selection. This feature makes it well suited to small-scale, in-depth studies. Convenience sampling is a method of choosing participants arbitrarily in an unstructured manner from the sample frame; a sample drawn on a purely opportunistic basis from a readily accessible sub-group of the population (Baker, 2002).

It is important to note that according to Patton (2002) sampling in qualitative research is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalisation from a sample to a population. The researcher will obtain a list of all designated employees belonging to the business unit from the Human Resource department of the Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation in South Africa. Invitations will be sent to all designated employees on the list and participants will be selected based on availability. The number of willing and accessible participants will therefore determine the size of the sample in the research.

#### **1.3.2.3.Data gathering**

Anecdote circles will be used to generate a narrative database exploring the experience of designated employees.

Anecdote circles is a narrative technique pioneered by Prof. Dave Snowden (Snowden, 1999a; 1999b) and consists of gathering a small group of people together to facilitate the informal sharing of anecdotal experiences by participants within a peer group (Anecdote, n.d.).

As a data gathering technique, anecdote circles are similar in form to an unstructured focus group. Focus groups are described as group interviews that capitalise on communication between participants in order to generate data. It is typically a group of people who share a similar type of experience, but that is not naturally constituted as an existing social group (Kitzinger, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) focus groups provide a social context for research. The group setting aids spontaneity and creates a more naturalistic and socially contextualised environment. As a type of focus group technique, anecdote circles specifically aim to elicit experiences. In this regard they do not provide insight into the interaction between group members when discussing differences of opinions or judgements, but create an opportunity to elicit narrative experiences in an interactive and dynamic manner. Each anecdote told triggers participants' subconscious memory of past events, making these conscious and thus revealing a rich tapestry of experience (Anecdote, n.d.).

Anecdotes can be described as real life accounts of an individual's or a community's experiences. They are unstructured, simple, convey various values, messages and rules, and are told from a

particular perspective. Anecdotes differ from stories in that they are based on fact and real experiences, where stories can reflect altered realities and carry a specific message (Anecdote circles, n.d.; Snowden, 2002). James and Minnis (2004) believe that the more intricate organisational knowledge is, the less effectively it can be codified. According to Patriotta (2003) anecdotes extract shared views and meanings for a community. These shared views are important to understand the common features within an organisation. There are many benefits associated with making use of anecdotes. Anecdotes can provide a source of information which may not surface through usual question and answer techniques. Anecdotes allow people a means of distilling information on behaviours and values that influence attitudes and shape the prevailing culture. In contexts where cultural diversity often inhibits communication and knowledge flow, narrative seems to find a resonance with many different cultural groupings. Anecdotes also provide participants with a means of communicating possibly difficult issues in a non-threatening manner (Blignaut, 2007; Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden, 2004). Collecting anecdotes of people's lives at work enables a rich tapestry to emerge, a tapestry that reflects the reality of the messy complexity of organisational life (Callahan, 2004).

Simply asking people to tell their stories rarely results in stories being told. Participants are often unsure of what is meant (Callahan, 2004). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) an exploratory study designed to understand underlying values, concepts and norms is likely to involve a number of very broad questions, encouraging the participant to take the lead and to shape their own narrative. For this reason the researcher will design prompts with an emotional hook for participants to recall their past experiences.

The researcher will extract the anecdotes from the information gathered in the anecdote circles and transcribe it verbatim.

#### **1.3.2.4.Data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. In this phase the researcher will make use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

This approach has been usefully applied to an extensive range of psychological enquiry (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is rooted in phenomenology in that its principal focus is on understanding participants' lived experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. It is concerned with subjective reports rather than the formulation of objective accounts (Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999; Smith, 2004). It is a data driven approach which prioritises participants' accounts. Whilst the researcher attempts to access the participants' personal world insofar as it is feasible, IPA acknowledges that this access is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions. Insight into the participants' subjective lived experience is promoted, whilst recognising the potential influence of the researcher's own preconceptions on the research process (Shaw, 2001; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Stiles, 2003). According to Smith et al. (1999) analysis requires close interaction between analyst and the text: the analyst seeks to comprehend the presented account whilst concurrently making use of his/her own 'interpretative resources'.

The approach is furthermore rooted in the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition in that the researcher is required to make sense of the participant's personal world through a process of interpretative activity (Palmer, 1969; Smith et al., 1999). Research is a dynamic process and the researcher has an active and central role to play (Smith, 1996). There is a dual interpretation process in that "the participant is trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

A key commitment of IPA is transparent systematic analysis of the data consistent with factors known to contribute to reliability and validity within qualitative research (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Mays & Pope, 2000; Reid et al., 2005; Stiles, 2003; Willig, 2001). This involves a number of steps (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 1999) which will be applied in this study in the following chronological, yet iterative manner: The researcher will immerse herself in the transcripts by reading through them a number of times and listening to the recordings of the sessions until the researcher has an overall sense of the data. The researcher will then begin naming themes through a process of abstraction, ensuring that each theme is represented in the

data. Once the entire transcript is coded, the researcher will extract and list the themes. The next step is for the researcher to cluster the themes together in a meaningful way. Once all the themes are clustered, the researcher will name the super-ordinate themes.

#### **1.4. CHAPTER DIVISION**

Chapter 1: Introduction, problem statement and objectives

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

#### **1.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter an introduction to the research study was given. The problem statement briefly outlined the constructs and reason for the study. Research objectives were given and the chapter was concluded by discussing the research methods. A chapter division was also given.

Chapter 2 contains the research article.

# **THE EXPERIENCES OF DESIGNATED EMPLOYEES IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CONSULTING BUSINESS UNIT**

**A. Strydom**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the experience of designated employees in a predominantly White consulting business unit. Applying a qualitative research design, 12 designated employees participated in anecdote circles and a total of 59 anecdotes were gathered. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to extract themes from the anecdotes. Thirty-two themes were identified that were grouped into seven super-ordinate themes. Themes that were uncovered were: A debilitating organisational culture; A constructive work environment; Poor orientation and integration into the business unit; Demanding consultant role; Dissatisfaction with careers; Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile and Involved management style.

## **OPSOMMING**

Die studie ondersoek die ervaring van aangewese werknemers in 'n oorwegend blanke konsultasie-besigheids-eenheid. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is aangewend met 12 aangewese werknemers wat deelgeneem het aan staaltjiesirkels en 59 staaltjies gegenereer het. Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analiese is gebruik om temas te identifiseer vanuit die staaltjies. Twee en dertig temas is geïdentifiseer wat gegroepeer is in sewe oorhoofse temas. Die temas is: 'n Aftakelende organisasie kultuur; 'n Konstruktiewe werksomgewing; Swak oriëntasie en integrasie in besigheids-eenheid; Veeleisende konsultant rol; Loopbaan ontevredenheid; Gevoel van ontoereikendheid in hantering van tipiese veeleisende klient; en 'n Betrokke bestuurstyl.

South Africa is a country of intense social diversity, defined primarily around race, nationality, language, class and religion (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). Many of the inequalities created and maintained by Apartheid, seem to have remained in the South African workplace. Various nationwide surveys have proved that race relations in the private sector have not adequately improved (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2006; Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006) despite positional empowerment of previously disadvantaged employees enforced through legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and Affirmative Action. Thomas (1996) emphasises that organisations on the surface appear to be promoting quality, yet they do not address critical issues such as organisational culture and climate, which are critical to the success of affirmative action and employment equity strategies. As such, managing diversity has been introduced as a holistic business strategy to create an organisational culture that will foster the advancement and integration of designated employees (Mavin & Girling, 2000; Van Vuuren, 2008). One of the principals underlying the managing diversity approach relates to establishing an organisational culture that is conducive to the integration of designated employees in the workforce and one that will manifest in a positive inter-racial working climate.

The research organisation seems to be a microcosm of the macro-environment with regard to the advancement of previously disadvantaged employees and the creation of a more diverse work team. Being a multinational firm, the research organisation proclaims a very progressive approach to promoting diversity, yet positive effects in this regard are not reflected in their South African consulting business unit. Here designated employees are distinctly in the minority and white males fill all the executive positions. Moreover, despite efforts to appoint employees from designated groups, turnover amongst designated employees is particularly high.

In light of relevant theory pointing to the necessary foundation of an organisational culture and climate conducive to diversity, the question arises whether aspects of the organisational culture and climate within the business unit may potentially hinder the retention of designated employees. The objective of the research was therefore to explore aspects of organisational culture and climate, in particular as experienced by designated employees in a South African consulting business unit of a Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation.

### **Equality in the South African context**

South Africa has one of the most unequal income distribution patterns in the world and poverty is still largely defined by skin colour, with Black people making up around 90% of the country's poor (United Nations Development Programme, 2003). While there has been a significant and rapid advance of Africans into and within the middle income group, the reality is that only 7.8% of Africans belong to this group, while 15.6% of this group are Coloured, 20.7% are Indian and 33% are White (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey<sup>2</sup> reports 30% of respondents cited income inequality as the greatest challenge to race relations and the creation of a more unified society (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2006).

For trust to develop between the different races in South Africa, informal inter-racial socialisation has to occur, yet the progress we are making in this regard is slow. The South African Social Attitudes Survey, conducted between August and October 2003, showed that there were improvements in perceptions of race relations: a total of 57% of the respondents felt that race relations had improved, 29% felt that they had remained the same and 14% felt that they had become worse. In the 2003 survey, Coloureds (61%), followed by Africans (59%), Indians (58%) and Whites (42%) reported improved race relations (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006).

According to information from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2006) informal inter-racial interaction amongst South Africans remains infrequent and largely limited to the higher income categories. The low desire to increase cross-racial contact and communication creates a parallel, as opposed to integrated, coexistence and provides the context within which the fear of the unknown thrives, which in turn creates a breeding ground for negative stereotypes.

Although results from the South African Social Attitudes Survey report that educational institutions and government departments have shown improved race relations, workplaces

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<sup>2</sup> The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey is an annual survey, which measures responses of the South African public to socio-political and economic change with particular emphasis of their impact on national reconciliation.

however, reveal one of the highest ratios of experience of racial discrimination. These results raise the question whether racism is being left to fester in the private sector (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006).

In the past 14 years since the Government of National Unity came into power, South African business has gone through a period of significant transformation. Previously excluded racial and ethnic groups are being both empowered and incorporated into management structures (Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). At the level of ownership and control of wealth, the proportion of senior management who are Black increased by 8.4% between 2000 and 2004; while for Whites a decrease of 8.6% was recorded over the same period (Policy Coordination and Advisory Services, 2006). See Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**CHANGE IN TOP MANAGEMENT ACCORDING TO RACE FROM 2000 - 2004**

| Group                | 2000 (%) | 2002 (%) | 2004 (%) | Total % point change |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Blacks (Accumulated) | 12.7     | 18.4     | 21.1     | 8.4                  |
| Whites               | 87.5     | 81.5     | 78.9     | -8.6                 |
| Africans             | 6.2      | 10.0     | 11.8     | 5.6                  |
| Coloureds            | 2.7      | 3.4      | 3.7      | 1.0                  |
| Indians              | 3.8      | 5.0      | 5.6      | 1.8                  |

Overall, progress into skilled and managerial work has, however, been slow. The legacy of apartheid resulted in structural inequalities in the acquisition of education, work, skill and access to managerial, professional and occupational positions and would not be completely eliminated in a short period of time (Horwitz, Browning, Jain & Steenkamp, 2002).

The absorption of previously disadvantaged individuals into higher skilled and managerial jobs is being nudged by measures such as employment equity legislation and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). Employment equity involves both the elimination of unfair discrimination and the establishment of specific measures to accelerate the advancement of Blacks, women and the disabled. One of the measures to accelerate the advancement of these

designated groups is affirmative action which involves 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 (Employment Equity Act, 1998; Human, Bluen & Davies, 1999). Affirmative action programmes have increasingly been criticised for being racist, elitist and for having very few positive results (De Beer & Radley, 2000). Fears exist that too much emphasis is placed on meeting employment targets without taking cognisance of whether the beneficiaries are capable of doing the work required. Another disadvantage of affirmative action is that it stigmatises the beneficiaries. Employees who benefit from affirmative action bear a mark of not being the best choice and this could impact on the individual's performance and self-esteem. There are many who argue that affirmative action uses reverse discrimination to solve the problem of discrimination and this approach can actually incite racism as opposed to decrease racism. Some are of the opinion that it favours a small group of Blacks who possess the required qualifications and experience while it is those who are wholly unqualified that are most in need of preferential treatment (Herholdt & Marx, 1999; Motileng, 2005; Thomas, 1996). While affirmative action help mitigates the historical effects of institutionalised racism by adjusting the diversity profile of organisations to better reflect the demography of the country's population, it has little impact on the career development and upward mobility of affirmative action candidates within the organisation (Leonard, 1990). Managing diversity has been proposed as a holistic management strategy to address the problems experienced with affirmative action policies.

### **Managing diversity**

Managing diversity can be defined as a planned, systematic and comprehensive managerial process for developing an organisational environment in which all employees, with their similarities and differences, can contribute to the strategic and competitive advantage of the organisation, and where no-one is excluded on the basis of factors unrelated to productivity (Thomas, 1996). Embarking on a diversity management process allows organisations to: tap into a range of skills not previously available in an organisation characterised by a homogeneous workforce; utilise all people to the maximum; promote organisational flexibility and attract and retain the best talent. Diverse populations have different experiences, insights, values and approaches to workplace issues resulting in different perspectives as well as alternative and

creative solutions to work-related problems (Cox & Blake, 1991; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001; Spataro, 2005; Thomas, 1996; Wilson, 1994).

The potential benefits of managing diversity are substantial but not automatic; the process of creating and capitalising on diversity must therefore be carefully managed. Contextual factors within organisations have been shown to affect reactions to diversity. Organisational culture is one such contextual factor that can address questions of salience, values and reactions to diversity (Ely & Thomas, 2001; McEnrue, 1993).

### **Organisational culture**

Organisational culture guides the definition of diversity in any given environment. It will determine the extent to which members emphasise or de-emphasise differences between individuals and it prescribes the appropriateness of different behaviours, therefore influencing the social interaction between members of majority and minority groups. Organisational culture will also determine how diversity initiatives will be adopted within the organisation (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996; Spataro, 2005). In essence the norms and values that comprise an organisational culture will aid or complicate the integration of employees who are diverse from the main group (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996). To effectively manage diversity, an organisation needs to develop a culture which represents values, beliefs, norms and attitudes that support the advancement of diversity employees (Barnard, 1993; Kersten, 2000).

Organisational culture can be defined as the set of shared, implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about and reacts to its various environments (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001). Schein (as cited in Barnard, 1993) defines organisational culture as the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems. Organisational culture is a multi-dimensional concept that can be seen as something which may be influenced, changed and manipulated and in turn influence, change and manipulate members and features of the organisation (Kilbourne, 1991; Smircich, 1983; Weeks, 1988). It fulfils four functions within an

organisation: it gives members an organisational identity; it facilitates collective commitment; it promotes social system stability and serves as a sense-making and control mechanism that guides and shapes the attitudes and behaviour of employees. This last function is of particular importance when reviewing diversity within an organisation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001; Robbins, 1998; Schultz, Bagraim, Potgieter, Viedge, & Werner, 2003).

Organisational culture operates at two different levels. At a visible level, culture is represented in artifacts, which consist of the physical manifestations of an organisation's culture. Examples include acronyms, awards and so forth. At a less visible level culture reflects the values and beliefs shared among organisational members. Organisational values are concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states that transcend situations and guide the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events. Values are the foundation of culture and tend to persist over time, being more resistant to change. Espoused values represent the stated values and norms that are preferred by the organisation. Enacted values on the other hand represent values and norms that are actually exhibited by employees (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

The values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which employees bring into the organisation are shaped by those prevailing in the individual's society at large and often form the basis for decisions and choices at work. According to Thomas and Bendixen (2000), it is therefore critical to gain an understanding of the values that people from different ethnic backgrounds bring into their places of employment. Values contain a judgemental element in that they carry an individual's ideas as to what is right, good or desirable (Beugré & Offodile, 2001; Robbins, 1998). People from different cultures and backgrounds vary in terms of their values, attitudes and beliefs. In a culturally diverse workplace, these differences affect work behaviour in a variety of ways (Ritvo, Litwin & Butler, 1995). The congruence between an individual's values and the organisation's values is significantly associated with organisational commitment, job satisfaction, intention to quit and turnover (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

Hofstede identified four dimensions in which national cultures differ:

- Power Distance indicates how power is distributed within the culture. A high power distance is reflected in more levels of hierarchy and centralised decision making, while a low power distance is reflected in cultures that emphasise networking and collaboration.
- Uncertainty Avoidance represents the extent to which uncertainty is found uncomfortable; the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance rely on formal rules and procedures to control events and create security. Such cultures avoid taking risks.
- Individualism / Collectivism represents the extent to which people prefer to make their own decisions and stay emotionally independent versus the extent to which they prefer to belong to strong, cohesive wider in-groups.
- Masculinity / Femininity reveals the preference for masculine values of assertiveness, competitiveness and materialism versus preference for values such as nurturing and supportiveness (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, 2001; Schultz et al., 2003).

These dimensions are not separate, they interact with each other to define and impact culture. The study conducted by Hofstede has been corroborated by a number of other researchers over the years. The dimensions identified by Hofstede can therefore be used as a theoretical basis from which to manage cultural diversity in an organisation (Reyneke, 2006).

Harrison and Stokes (1992) developed a typology of organisational culture that divides it into four dimensions, namely role, power, performance and supportive cultures. These typologies occur in organisations in combination with one another and each is based on its own values, patterns of behaviour, methods of decision-making and motivating employees and typical management style. The dimensions are described as follows:

- Power culture is a culture characterised by authority and hierarchy with unequal access to resources. People in power positions use resources to satisfy or frustrate other people and leadership is based on paternalism and justice. Managers are often power hungry and rule by fear. Employees are in conflict with one another to gain more power and internal politics are prevalent. Leaders adopt a view that they are obliged to their sub-ordinates and with loyal employees they are strict though fair (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).
- Role culture is a culture characterised by bureaucracy where individuals rely on stability and predictability. Predictability is seen as more important than skills and function is

more important than the individual. The values underlying the role culture are administrative order, dependence, rationality and consistency. Formal lines of communication quickly become overloaded and this difficulty in handling information makes the organisation slow to adapt to environmental changes. Employees are managed as though they cannot be relied upon and autonomy, discretion and initiative are restricted activities within the rules (Estienne, 1997; Harrison & Stokes, 1992).

- Performance culture is typified by employees with a high degree of commitment and personal satisfaction who take a positive view of a performance-oriented culture. Employees manage themselves because they believe they work for something larger than themselves and their morale is high. They have a sense of urgency, understand and support the values, and errors are viewed as a learning experience. Employees in a performance culture are in support of a common vision and find reward in their work. Communication channels are open and are not restricted to positional power. Employees on lower levels are empowered to make decisions and leadership is based on knowledge and skills (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).
- Support culture is characterised by reciprocal trust between the individuals and the organisation. Employees believe they are regarded as valuable human beings and good relations are encouraged. In this culture, employees care for one another and they enjoy going to work. They have a positive view of their colleagues, suppliers and clients because they feel that they are being cared for by the organisation. The support culture is typified by a high flow of information, both informal and formal communication. The employees support harmony in the workplace (Harrison & Stokes, 1992).

Organisations are social entities and as a result very complex. An organisation may predominantly reflect one type of culture while at the same time displaying characteristics associated with other types of cultures (Schultz et al., 2003). Every culture is unique and therefore cannot necessarily be defined by only one type of culture; indeed all the mentioned types can be integrated into an organisational culture (Nixon, 1987; Weeks, 1988).

### **Organisational climate**

Organisational climate can be described as the character of the organisation's internal environment. It refers to employees' perceptions with regards to specific characteristics of their work environment (Bookbinder, 1984; Combrink, 2004; Weeks & Lessing, 1988). Culture and climate are not the same concept. Climate refers to individual perceptions that are short term and can be easily manipulated whereas culture refers to shared beliefs, norms and ideas that are not easy to change and manifest over a longer period (Barnard, 1993). Turnipseed (1988) suggests that organisational climate exists as a sub-set within culture, it influences culture and in return is influenced by culture. An analysis of the organisational climate will provide important information regarding the culture of the organisation, but a deeper analysis of values will lead to a better understanding of organisational behaviour (Bookbinder, 1984).

Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1979) described seven dimensions of organisational climate:

- Conformity - the perception that there are many externally imposed constraints in the organisation. The degree to which members feel that there are many rules, procedures, policies and practices to which they have to conform rather than being able to do their work as they see fit.
- Responsibility - the extent to which members of the organisation are given personal responsibility to achieve their part of the organisation's goals. The degree to which members feel that they can make decisions and solve problems without having to constantly check with superiors.
- Standards - the emphasis the organisation places on quality performance and outstanding production including the degree to which the member feels the organisation is setting challenging goals for itself and communicating these goal commitments to members.
- Rewards - the degree to which members feel that they are being recognised and rewarded for good work rather than being ignored, criticised or punished when something goes wrong.
- Organisational clarity - the feeling among members that things are well-organised and goals are clearly defined rather than being disorderly, confused or chaotic.
- Warmth and support - the perception that friendliness is a valued norm in the organisation; that members trust one another and offer support to one another. The feeling that good relationships prevail in the work environment.

- Leadership - the willingness of organisation members to accept leadership and direction from other qualified individuals. As needs for leadership arise, members feel free to take leadership roles and are rewarded for successful leadership. Leadership is based on expertise. The organisation is not dominated by or dependent on one or two individuals.

### **Contextualising the study: the research organisation**

The Employment Equity Act (1998) defines designated groups as Black people (Africans, Coloureds and Indians), women and people with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, the researcher only focused on African, Coloured and Indian employees working in the consulting business unit of a Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation.

The corporation is the world's largest information technology company spanning across 174 countries. It manufactures and sells computer hardware, software, infrastructure services, hosting services and consulting services in areas ranging from mainframe computers to nanotechnology.

The corporation is culturally diverse, not only in nationality but also in its employee base with regards to race, gender, culture, lifestyle, age, disability and sexual orientation. It has a long history of progressive management when it comes to civil rights and equal employment. It realised that diversity enhances creativity and innovation and that a company needs to reflect the diversity of the talent pool it wants to hire and retain. But it is also about more than expanding the talent pool; the corporation expanded minority markets dramatically by promoting diversity in its own workforce. By deliberately seeking ways to more effectively reach a broader range of customers, it has seen significant bottom-line results (Thomas, 2004).

This progressive approach to diversity does not seem to be reflected in the consulting business unit located in South Africa. Designated employees are distinctly in the minority and white males fill all the executive positions. Table 2 reflects the diversity statistics for the business unit according to grading at the beginning of October 2008 (Band 06 employees are the most junior, while Band D employees are the most senior):

**TABLE 2**  
**DIVERSITY STATISTICS FOR THE BUSINESS UNIT**

| Grading      | African   | Coloured | Indian    | White     |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Band 06      | 9         | 0        | 3         | 4         |
| Band 07      | 4         | 1        | 3         | 8         |
| Band 08      | 4         | 3        | 10        | 33        |
| Band 09      | 0         | 0        | 1         | 17        |
| Band 10      | 0         | 0        | 0         | 7         |
| Band D       | 0         | 0        | 0         | 5         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>74</b> |

Given the diversity profile of the business unit, the question arises: how much do the designated employees identify with the group and feel a part of the culture?

In the last three years, the business unit has actively endeavoured to grow the employee base and more specifically the diversity profile of the business unit. This has proved more difficult than expected because of a shortage of highly experienced skills required for consulting, a lucrative contracting market and costs associated with top candidates. Research shows that in the external labour market skill shortages remain, requiring employees to continue to adjust remuneration policies to attract employees who have the skills. South Africa's chronic skills shortage means that workers at the top end are paid a premium (Bhorat & Cassim, 2004; Horwitz et al., 2002). According to Froneman (2004) recruitment will remain a problem especially as the larger consulting firms compete aggressively for so called "high-potentials". A price war and decreased loyalty of key staff are the expected result.

Recruitment efforts have consistently been outweighed by the attrition rate. In the period January 2005 until March 2007, the business unit has recruited 90 consultants, but during the same period 95 consultants resigned. High staff turnover and skills shortages have significantly impacted on the consulting industry in South Africa. According to Kransdorff (1996) the average South African employee switches employers at least seven times in his/her working lifetime. In the

consulting industry, the rate of tenure is even less, with consultants changing employers every 2 to 3 years. Turnover of highly skilled professionals carries an enormous price tag and has an impact with the loss of clients and experience (Theys, 2004).

More specifically, the business unit seems to be unable to hold onto its designated employees. Quarterly reports compiled from seven exit interviews conducted with designated employees leaving the business unit between the period January 2006 and November 2006, revealed that compensation was most often cited as a reason for leaving, followed by lack of career path and better career opportunities, culture and management style. Other reasons cited include lack of support from leadership and a wish to develop more specialised skills. A number of employees reported that they were headhunted. These reasons correspond with the literature in Radloff (2005) which states that designated employees leave companies because they are poached by competitors; for better payment or benefits; for growth and development opportunities and because they do not feel valued or listened to. Organisational factors such as job content and management style and individual factors such as career aspirations and job satisfaction can also influence turnover. Higher turnover can be linked to negative effects of diversity (Kochan et al., 2003). With the changes in workforce demographics, employee mobility and globalisation, holding on to valuable employees is a significant concern for all companies. This is particularly true in developing parts of the world where high economic growth rates, coupled with limited pools of experienced workers, have caused high levels of turnover (Institute for Business Value, 2006).

According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement and growth are related to job satisfaction, while extrinsic factors such as company policy and administration, pay and benefits, relationships with co-workers, supervision and status are associated with dissatisfaction. Factors that lead to job satisfaction are separate and distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Therefore removing dissatisfying characteristics from a job, does not necessarily make the job satisfying or guarantee employee retention (Robbins, 1998).

The diversity profile of the business unit demonstrates that managers are almost exclusively White males. White managers often rely on Western values that are inconsistent with an African approach to management. An African management style (Afrocentricity) encompasses African history, traditions, culture, mythology and value systems. The resulting management philosophy views the corporation as a community and can be summed up by the Ubuntu philosophy, that we are what we are through our interaction with others. This approach stresses supportiveness, sharing and cooperation and is opposed to individualism, competitiveness and unilateral decision making which are more aligned with a Western management style (Geldenhuys, 2006; Schultz et al., 2003).

Given the current diversity profile of the business unit it is clear that the environment is not equitable. Whether the culture in the business unit is not conducive to the upward mobility of designated employees and whether efforts to manage diversity are successful, may be questionable. In order to address such questions, the researcher deemed it useful to explore aspects of the organisational culture and climate from specifically the viewpoint of designated employees. The aim of this research therefore is to explore the experience of designated employees in a consulting business unit within the research organisation.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

Mouton (1996) defines a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) a research design is a strategic framework, a plan that guides research activity to ensure that sound conclusions are reached.

### **Research approach**

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the nature of the information required will determine the choice of research approach. In this study the researcher is interested in studying the experience of designated employees as it unfolds in the real-world without manipulation or control, taking into account the context in which participants find themselves and allowing for the phenomena to

be described and displayed as they are experienced by designated employees. A qualitative research design was therefore deemed to be most efficient in addressing the research objective (Flick, 1998; Grbich, 2007; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Qualitative research focuses on meaning in context and aims to produce in-depth understandings of social reality rather than quantity of understanding (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Merriam, 1998). It is concerned with understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives, learning how participants make sense of their circumstances, experiences and structure of the world (Greswell, 1994; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

This approach aligns with the exploratory nature and purpose of the study. Given the current demographic profile of the business unit, the struggle to retain designated employees and the importance of effective diversity management as stated in the literature review, the researcher became curious about how designated employees actually experience working in the business unit. Arkava and Lane (1983) and Guy, Edgley, Arafat, and Allen (1987) stipulate that exploratory studies should be undertaken when the researcher is curious about a situation and wishes to understand it better. Exploration is valuable because it breaks new ground and often illuminates a problem. Exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research. They employ an open, flexible and inductive approach as researchers attempt to look for new insights into phenomena (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Wechler, 1981). According to Mouton (1996), exploratory studies usually lead to insight and comprehension, rather than collection of accurate and replicable data.

### **Research methodology**

The researcher is of the opinion that truth can only be known through exploring an individual's experience of a phenomenon. No single reality exists as every individual interprets his/her experiences according to their own perceptions. In this study, importance is therefore attached to the meaning that designated employees attributed to their experiences of reality, their world and their relationships. This view is in line with a phenomenological approach (Kockelmans, 1987). Phenomenology can be described as a method of inquiry based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and

not of anything independent of human consciousness. The reality that counts is the reality each participant comes to know and the experience of the participant becomes the research object (Marton, 1994; Meister & Nolan, 2001; phenomenology, n.d.). In its pure form, phenomenological research seeks mainly to describe, rather than to explain (Lester, 1999). The method of phenomenology involves prolonged interaction with a selected number of individuals in order to access patterns, themes and relationships of meaning of a particular phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1975).

### **Participants**

The unit of analysis in this study is the group of designated employees working in the business unit. A non-probability convenience sample of designated employees was used to reach the objectives of this research. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) define non-probability samples as a range of sampling strategies used in qualitative research where units are selected to reflect particular features of a group. These samples are not intended to be statistically representative, but instead the characteristics of the population are used as the basis of selection. This feature makes it well suited to small-scale, in-depth studies. Convenience sampling is a method of choosing participants arbitrarily in an unstructured manner from the sample frame; a sample drawn on a purely opportunistic basis from a readily accessible sub-group of the population (Baker, 2002).

It is important to note that according to Patton (2002) sampling in qualitative research is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalisation from a sample to a population. The researcher obtained a list of all designated employees belonging to the business unit from the Human Resource department of the Multinational Information Technology and Consulting Corporation in South Africa. Invitations were sent to all designated employees on the list and participants were selected based on availability. The number of willing and accessible participants therefore determined the size of the sample in the research. Twelve designated employees participated in the study which represents 32% of the total number of designated employees in the business unit. According to Woods and Catanzaro (1988) small samples can deliver reliable research data and are therefore acceptable for phenomenology studies. All participants selected were regarded as being information rich, illuminative and reputable with

regards to the phenomenon being studied and able to offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest. See table 3 for a list of employees partaking in the research.

**TABLE 3**  
**LIST OF EMPLOYEES PARTAKING IN RESEARCH**

| Number | Participant Job Title | Grading | Race    | Gender |
|--------|-----------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1      | Consultant            | Band 7  | Indian  | Male   |
| 2      | Management Consultant | Band 9  | Indian  | Male   |
| 3      | Senior Consultant     | Band 8  | African | Male   |
| 4      | Consultant            | Band 7  | Indian  | Male   |
| 5      | Senior Consultant     | Band 8  | Indian  | Male   |
| 6      | Senior Consultant     | Band 8  | Indian  | Male   |
| 7      | Junior Consultant     | Band 6  | African | Male   |
| 8      | Junior Consultant     | Band 6  | African | Female |
| 9      | Junior Consultant     | Band 6  | African | Male   |
| 10     | Consultant            | Band 7  | African | Male   |
| 11     | Junior Consultant     | Band 6  | African | Male   |
| 12     | Consultant            | Band 7  | African | Female |

### **Data gathering**

Anecdote circles were used to generate a narrative database exploring the experience of designated employees.

Anecdote circles is a narrative technique pioneered by Prof. Dave Snowden (Snowden, 1999a; 1999b) and consists of gathering a small group of people together to facilitate the informal sharing of anecdotal experiences by participants within a peer group (Anecdote, n.d.).

As a data gathering technique, anecdote circles are similar in form to an unstructured focus group. Focus groups are described as group interviews that capitalise on communication between

participants in order to generate data. It is typically a group of people who share a similar type of experience, but that is not naturally constituted as an existing social group (Kitzinger, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) focus groups provide a social context for research. The group setting aids spontaneity and creates a more naturalistic and socially contextualised environment. As a type of focus group technique, anecdote circles specifically aim to elicit experiences. In this regard they do not provide insight into the interaction between group members when discussing differences of opinions or judgements, but create an opportunity to elicit narrative experiences in an interactive and dynamic manner. Each anecdote told triggers participants' subconscious memory of past events, making these conscious and thus revealing a rich tapestry of experience (Anecdote, n.d.).

Anecdotes can be described as real life accounts of an individual's or a community's experiences. They are unstructured, simple, convey various values, messages and rules, and are told from a particular perspective. Anecdotes differ from stories in that they are based on fact and real experiences, where stories can reflect altered realities and carry a specific message (Anecdote circles, n.d.; Snowden, 2002). James and Minnis (2004) believe that the more intricate organisational knowledge is, the less effectively it can be codified. According to Patriotta (2003) anecdotes extract shared views and meanings for a community. These shared views are important to understand the common features within an organisation. There are many benefits associated with making use of anecdotes. Anecdotes can provide a source of information which may not surface through usual question and answer techniques. Anecdotes allow people a means of distilling information on behaviours and values that influence attitudes and shape the prevailing culture. In contexts where cultural diversity often inhibits communication and knowledge flow, narrative seems to find a resonance with many different cultural groupings. Anecdotes also provide participants with a means of communicating possibly difficult issues in a non-threatening manner (Blignaut, 2007; Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden, 2004). Collecting anecdotes of people's lives at work enables a rich tapestry to emerge, a tapestry that reflects the reality of the messy complexity of organisational life (Callahan, 2004).

At the start of each of the anecdote circles the researcher briefed the participants about the research and how the information will be used going forward. Participants were made aware that

the sessions were being digitally recorded and the confidentiality as well as anonymity of participants were emphasised. The importance of this approach is mentioned by Meulenber-Buskens (1989). The sessions were held in a relaxed environment and the researcher ensured that everyone was at ease. Participants were stimulated to share anecdotes about real experiences (their own or someone else's) that pertained to their jobs and specifically times when experiential knowledge were utilised. Participants were reminded to refrain from opinions. The content and direction of each group session were primarily determined by the participants, allowing them to recount experiences that were particularly salient to them. According to Callahan (2004) it is important to be aware of how the hierarchy within the group may affect the data. The researcher therefore took care to ensure the group consisted of peers and that people from different levels of the organisational hierarchy were not included in the same group.

Simply asking people to tell their stories rarely results in stories being told. Participants are often unsure of what is meant (Callahan, 2004). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) an exploratory study designed to understand underlying values, concepts and norms is likely to involve a number of very broad questions, encouraging the participant to take the lead and to shape their own narrative. For this reason prompts were designed with an emotional hook for people to recall their past experiences (see table 4).

**TABLE 4**  
**EXAMPLE OF PROMPTS USED IN ANECDOTE CIRCLES**

| Prompt                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Dimension  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| You are having coffee with your best friend. They tell you that they have been offered a position within the business unit; which experience of yours or a colleague would you share with them to encourage them to join? And to discourage?                                                                            | Culture    |
| Whilst working on a project in Ghana you befriend a local consultant who tells you that she has the opportunity to work on a really great project at our business unit in South Africa, but she has concerns about "fitting in". Which stories would you share with her about your own, or your colleagues' experience? | Diversity  |
| Most people want to climb the corporate ladder. Which experiences can you share about what you need to do to get ahead in our business unit?                                                                                                                                                                            | Leadership |

The researcher assumed the role of the story listener, using non-directive dialogue techniques, like minimal verbal responses (e.g. mm-mm) and reflection to assist the participants to share experiences. From time to time the researcher would ask questions like “Could you give an example of that” or “Tell us more”. Through interest and attention, the researcher gave participants “permission” to dig deeper into the experience and share their stories. The researcher resisted the urge to fill silence with another prompt, rather providing the space for stories to emerge. The groups did not contain more than 4 participants at a time and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The complete sessions were recorded on a digital tape recorder.

The researcher extracted anecdotes from the information gathered in the anecdote circles and transcribed it verbatim. A total of 59 anecdotes were collected during the course of the anecdote circles.

### **Field Notes**

Immediately after each session, the researcher wrote down the impressions of the session (according to guidelines by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2002). Field notes included aspects that were heard, seen, experienced and thought about during the course of the anecdote circle and aids in substantiating data (see Wolfinger, 2002). The researcher wrote down her emotions, preconceptions, expectations and prejudices so that they could be taken into account in the final product.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. In this phase the researcher made use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This approach has been usefully applied to an extensive range of psychological enquiry (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is rooted in phenomenology in that its principal focus is on understanding participants’ lived experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. It is concerned with subjective reports rather than the formulation of objective accounts (Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999; Smith, 2004). It is a data driven approach which

prioritises participants' accounts. Whilst the researcher attempts to access the participants' personal world insofar as it is feasible, IPA acknowledges that this access is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions. Insight into the participants' subjective lived experience is promoted, whilst recognising the potential influence of the researcher's own preconceptions on the research process (Shaw, 2001; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Stiles, 2003). According to Smith et al. (1999) analysis requires close interaction between analyst and the text: the analyst seeks to comprehend the presented account whilst concurrently making use of his/her own 'interpretative resources'.

The approach is furthermore rooted in the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition in that the researcher is required to make sense of the participant's personal world through a process of interpretative activity (Palmer, 1969; Smith et al., 1999). Research is a dynamic process and the researcher has an active and central role to play (Smith, 1996). There is a dual interpretation process in that "the participant is trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

A key commitment of IPA is transparent systematic analysis of the data consistent with factors known to contribute to reliability and validity within qualitative research (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Mays & Pope, 2000; Reid et al., 2005; Stiles, 2003; Willig, 2001). This involves a number of steps (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 1999) applied in this study in the following chronological, yet iterative manner:

As the first step in the analytical process, the researcher read the transcript of all the anecdotes a number of times and immersed herself in the data by repetitive listening to the recorded group sessions. In IPA the analysis is based on a careful reading of the participant's account. As the researcher was reading through the transcripts, comments (which included notes on striking issues, summaries, connections and preliminary interpretations) were jotted down in the left margin next to the anecdotes. This continued until the researcher had an overall sense of the data. The researcher also reviewed her field notes taken down at the end of each session (compare Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Once this process has been completed for the whole transcript, further review enabled the researcher to begin to name themes by a process of abstraction. Themes don't reside in the data; they reside in the head of the researcher, from thinking about the data and creating links as we understand them (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). The researcher attempted to acknowledge and suspend any existing knowledge of the field and personal experiences within it, in an attempt to see the world as it is experienced by the participants. Still, it is acknowledged that inevitably, the researcher focussed on the data from a particular viewpoint and as such the themes examined can only be said to constitute a subset of the total themes existing in the data. The researcher ensured that each theme was represented by data in the transcripts to minimise researcher bias. This was a challenging process that required considerable interaction with the data. These preliminary themes were inserted in a margin on the right hand side of the text. The researcher took care to ensure that the names given to events, objects, actions and interactions in the data reflect the context of the respondent's words and ensuring that the interpretations were grounded within the data. The research process was an iterative process, where passages were analysed repeatedly in the light of themes identified as the analysis progressed. The researcher kept a memo outlining analytical decisions to assist with further analysis and to enable her to give rationale for the analysis.

Once the entire transcript was coded, the researcher extracted and listed the themes.

In the next stage the researcher looked for connections between the themes in order to cluster them together in a meaningful way. The researcher approached this task by asking questions about a theme and connecting to other themes that answered the questions.

Once all the themes were clustered, the researcher named the super-ordinate (overarching) themes by looking at what the sub-themes have in common. A table was drawn up for each super-ordinate theme, linking each sub-theme to verbatim extracts from the data as seen in Table 5. The use of verbatim extracts is central to IPA. Verbatim extracts from transcripts provide 'grounding' in examples and act as alternative criteria allowing the reader to make his or her own assessment of the interpretations made (Elliot et al., 1999).

**TABLE 5**  
**THEMES EXTRACTED FROM THE ANECDOTES**

| Number  | Super-ordinate Theme                  | Theme                                 | Verbatim extracts from raw data                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1 | A debilitating organisational culture | Bureaucracy                           | "...wheels turn slowly in this organisation".                                                                                                                                              |
|         |                                       | Processes                             | "...the organisation had all these processes and admin that I had to complete".                                                                                                            |
|         |                                       | Insensitivity to cultural differences | "...different cultures are not taken into account."                                                                                                                                        |
|         |                                       | Impersonal atmosphere                 | "...no-one stops their work and just say hello"                                                                                                                                            |
|         |                                       | Use of acronyms                       | "...they would just blurt out all these acronyms and I didn't know what it means..."                                                                                                       |
|         |                                       | Mistakes                              | "We never spoke about the incident; it was never mentioned at all."                                                                                                                        |
|         |                                       | Communication                         | "...there was no open communication"                                                                                                                                                       |
|         |                                       | Ineffective support                   | "...realised nothing has happened because that wasn't the right person to request it from, but they didn't bother to come back to me to tell me that."                                     |
| Theme 2 | A constructive work environment       | Flexibility                           | "... It gives me the opportunity to leave earlier in the afternoon... It is so much better than working in the banking industry..."                                                        |
|         |                                       | Learning                              | "...the prospects of learning within [the organisation] are amazing..."                                                                                                                    |
|         |                                       | Work standards and ethics             | "...everyone is putting in the long hours, working over the weekends and in the evenings."                                                                                                 |
|         |                                       | Contractors                           | "...we are delivering the project with contractors and these individuals are not as committed to getting the job done and to the same standards"                                           |
|         |                                       | Project environment                   | "... I didn't feel comfortable asking anyone of them the questions that were milling around in my head... then I was assigned to a project... and everyone was so helpful and supportive." |
|         |                                       | Teamwork                              | "... I don't want to let my team members down"                                                                                                                                             |

| Number  | Super-ordinate Theme                                        | Theme                               | Verbatim extracts from raw data                                                                                                                 |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 3 | Poor orientation and integration into the business unit     | Orientation                         | "...but because I wasn't inducted into [the organisation] I didn't know what to do..."                                                          |
|         |                                                             | Self-teaching                       | "Everything I know I had to learn myself or ask people for information."                                                                        |
|         |                                                             | Finding information                 | "...I was sent from pillar to post to get pricing information"                                                                                  |
| Theme 4 | Demanding consultant role                                   | Pressure                            | "...I was under huge time pressure"                                                                                                             |
|         |                                                             | Impressions                         | "I didn't want it to look as though I wasn't serious about my job."                                                                             |
|         |                                                             | Empowerment                         | "...it was my responsibility to ensure that my work was done on time and according to the right standards"                                      |
| Theme 5 | Dissatisfaction with careers                                | Career planning and direction       | "...I have been pushed around from one project to another without being given the stability to complete a full lifecycle of an implementation." |
|         |                                                             | Career progression                  | "I wasn't presented with the opportunity to actually realise my targets and as a result I did not get a promotion"                              |
|         |                                                             | Manager influence on career         | "...three people who play an important role in my career have resigned..."                                                                      |
|         |                                                             | Career and remuneration             | "...And to me, career growth is linked to money."                                                                                               |
| Theme 6 | Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile | Difficult clients                   | "I had a difficult project, where things would get personal sometimes"                                                                          |
|         |                                                             | Demanding clients                   | "...client kept asking for changes to the deliverables."                                                                                        |
|         |                                                             | Clients neglecting responsibilities | "...She said ...'SAP is not one of my priorities'..."                                                                                           |
|         |                                                             | Interaction with clients            | "...there were so many things I did for the client that were actually completely out of scope, just to keep the client happy."                  |

| Number  | Super-ordinate Theme      | Theme                        | Verbatim extracts from raw data                                                                    |
|---------|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 7 | Involved management style | Interaction with managers    | "...often met with me informally at my desk and we talked to each other individual to individual." |
|         |                           | Manager guidance and support | "My manager gave me a lot of valuable guidance "                                                   |
|         |                           | Recognition                  | "...even the big boss said it was good."                                                           |
|         |                           | Managing performance         | "...this individual's behaviour was never addressed..."                                            |

### **Role of the researcher**

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In this study the researcher interacts with the participants, collecting data from participants mainly through group sessions, subjectively interpreting the data and presenting themes and relationships from the data with the aim to understand the experience of designated employees within a particular context, thus generating the subjective meaning of data (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The results of qualitative research inevitably bear traces of the researcher. For this reason the researcher provides a comprehensive description of the research process and reflects on decisions made and how these have shaped the outcome of the research (Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001; Holland, 1999).

### **Criteria for judging qualitative data**

The criteria for judging qualitative data are different from that of quantitative data. The alternative criteria for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative data are (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Trochim, 2006):

### **Credibility**

The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research (Trochim, 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1985) proposed a few strategies that would make the data more believable:

- a) *Prolonged engagement* – allowing sufficient time to learn the culture of the organisation, to test for misinformation and to build trust; so as to fully understand the phenomenon within the context in which it is embedded.

The researcher's personal experience working in the business unit ensured a familiarity with the environment and an understanding of the general culture of the business unit. The aim of the study, however, was to understand how designated employees experience working in the business unit and the researcher could not assume to know their experiences regardless of how long the researcher's tenure. However, having worked alongside most of the participants in the study, the researcher had already earned the trust of the participants. The researcher was not perceived to be "part of the system" but rather "one of us" and as a result the participants felt at ease talking about their experiences. This was evident in the anecdote circles where participants felt comfortable to share sensitive stories about their frustrations of working for the company.

b) *Referential adequacy*: This involves material such as audio or video taping to document findings.

Referential adequacy was ensured in the study by digitally recording the anecdote circles and then transcribing the anecdotes verbatim.

c) *Member checks*: Data, interpretations and conclusions are tested with the participants from whom the data was originally collected.

In this study, the researcher scheduled a session to present the findings from the research to the participants in the study and ask for feedback on preliminary interpretations. The only amendment that participants suggested was to move the theme 'Manager influence on career' from the super-ordinate theme 'Involved management style' to 'Dissatisfaction with careers'. In addition the researcher also discussed her analysis with members of their target population who were unable to attend the anecdote circles (Touroni & Coyle, 2002).

The findings from this study also correspond with the reasons cited by designated employees in exit interviews for leaving the company.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalising. The researcher attempted to provide detailed information regarding the context of the study. The researcher also presented in-depth data (using actual words from the anecdotes) so that the context becomes more apparent to

the reader. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), transferability is enhanced when the researcher provides a thick description of the context of the research setting and the research participants. It remains however, the responsibility of the person who wishes to “transfer” the results to a different context to make a judgement on how sensible the transfer is (Trochim, 2006). Silverman (2000) also suggests that the use of a particular analytical model enhances the transferability of the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research involves human beings as participants and various ethical dilemmas may emerge and threaten the data. Research ethics provide researchers with a code of moral guidelines on how to conduct research in an acceptable way. The following were applicable at all times to maintain an ethical climate (Struwig & Stead, 2001):

- The researcher obtained permission from the Business Unit Executive to conduct the research within the business unit. Participants were made aware of what the study involved prior to the start of any of the sessions and verbal consent was obtained from all participants to proceed with the study.
- The researcher informed subjects of all aspects of the research that might have influenced willingness to participate and answered all queries from the participants on features that may have had negative effects or consequences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).
- Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Information from participants is held in confidence. This notion was reinforced with participants by confirming that the information will only be used for the purpose of the study.
- Participants in all sessions were informed that the sessions were digitally recorded. According to Corey, Corey, and Callanan (1998) it is important that participants understand the reasons for recordings, how they will be used and stored and who will have access to them. All participants were informed of the above and assured that only the researcher has access to the recordings and the transcripts of the interviews.
- The researcher was honest, fair and respectful towards the participants and did not attempt to mislead or misinform the participants.
- The researcher respected the rights and dignity of others. This included respecting the privacy, confidentiality and autonomy of the research participants.

- The welfare of others was of foremost concern. The researcher avoided any harm befalling the research participants as a consequence of the interaction with them.

## RESULTS

The results obtained are shown in Table 5. Seven super-ordinate themes were identified in the anecdotes with specific themes supporting each of the super-ordinate themes. Table 5 shows the super-ordinate themes along with the themes and verbatim excerpts from the anecdotes regarding each of the themes. As the researcher, my main concern was not necessarily with the prevalence of each theme, but instead with the richness of particular passages that highlight the theme and how the theme illuminates the research objective (Shaw, 2001).

### **Theme 1: A debilitating organisational culture**

Designated employees experience the organisation as very bureaucratic; managed through a myriad of processes and procedures that are complicated to understand and extremely time consuming to complete. The fact that the organisation is so process-driven causes a lot of frustration amongst designated employees. Some of the responses in this regard were:

*"I worked with a new hire on one of my projects and one of the first things I told him was to prepare himself for the shock that he is going to get when he gets involved in the processes."*

*"To make things worse the organisation had all these processes and admin that I had to complete."*

*"We have all these processes we need to complete ..."*

*"... I was always complaining about having to do it ... I really hated it... "*

As a result of the bureaucratic nature of the organisation, they see the company as a bit slow to respond and reactive in many ways: *"...wheels turn slowly in this organisation"*.

Designated employees feel that the organisation lacks awareness when it comes to different cultures. They believe employees' different cultural needs are not taken into account and state the following regarding the issue:

*"...We had a function with a little 'do' outside... but the people who organised the food did not take everyone's needs into account... it just showed that different cultures are not taken into account".*

*"...We chose to have Halaal, but on the day that we arrived and asked for the person to give us their credentials, the person could not tell us where the meat was from. Because I am Muslim and because of my religious affirmation I cannot just eat any meat and it really made me feel that [the organisation] is not culturally tolerant".*

*"...going forward I am hesitant to attend [the organisation] functions".*

This seems to be contrary to what designated employees experienced at other organisations: *"I come from a company that went to extra lengths to ensure everyone's needs are taken into account."*

Furthermore, designated employees describe the atmosphere in the organisation as cold and impersonal which seems to lead to feelings of isolation. Participants stated:

*"...no-one will stop their work and just say hello".*

*"...I go to my desk and sit down without anybody even looking up".*

*"...nobody knew me or knew I was a graduate. I sat upstairs at one of the hot-desks and all these consultants were sitting around me, but I didn't feel comfortable asking anyone of them the questions that were milling around in my head".*

Another factor that leads to feelings of isolation is the use of acronyms in the organisation. Designated employees report that the use of acronyms and unknown terminology is prevalent and that it serves as a gatekeeper into the organisation. Some of the comments were:

*"...I would sit in the company of other people and they would just blurt out all these acronyms and I didn't know what it means..."*

*"The minute I started to relate to the acronyms I felt like I was part of [the organisation]."*

*"...they would use this terminology that I didn't understand..."*

Designated employees believe that the organisation does not allow for or tolerate any mistakes. They explain that where mistakes are made it is not discussed and employees are isolated because of their mistakes. Participants described it as follows:

*"...I felt under a lot of pressure because there is no room for error in [the organisation]"*

*"...A big mistake was made... We were told not to contact the person at all until the issue was resolved."*

*"...We never spoke about the incident; it was never mentioned at all."*

*"...Eventually the person came back and was sent to work on another project."*

Designated employees raised a concern with the way information is shared within the organisation. They believe that the organisation is not always open and honest in their communications with employees. They feel that important information is not communicated in a timely manner, putting pressure on employees to complete actions within the relevant timeframe. They also feel that at times, the modes of communication are inappropriate. As designated employees are mainly based at client site, they often receive emails with important information which they would have preferred to be discussed face to face. At times, designated employees also resent the tone of some communications. One employee recounts how he received an email that was copied to his manager, labelling him a delinquent on something that nobody ever explained to him he should do:

*"Last year I was labelled a delinquent on ILC, but I didn't even know what ILC was. Nobody ever told me about it or showed me how to complete it. I didn't like the way they went about that."*

*"So I just received this email that something needed to be done by the following week."*

*"I did not receive a response. I felt like the organisation was not open with me at the time."*

*"One senior manager just left the organisation without telling anyone. No-one who reported to him knew that he has left. I spoke to one of his employees at the time and she was under the impression that he was away on leave. In the meantime he resigned."*

Designated employees feel that the support structures that have been put in place in the organisation are not very effective. They find it extremely difficult to determine who are the right people to contact for assistance and once requests have been submitted, response seems slow. Some of the responses in this regard, were:

*"I have sent an email requesting for something to be logged on the system, and I assumed it would be done. Two, three weeks later I realised that nothing has happened because that wasn't the right person to request it from, but they didn't bother to come back to me to tell me that."*

## **Theme 2: A constructive work environment**

Designated employees believe the work environment within the business unit is flexible and describes different aspects of this flexible work environment. Designated employees appreciate the flexibility afforded them regarding work hours. The fact that they can structure their working day according to what is important to them as an individual has a very positive impact. Participants explain:

*"I live in Pretoria and everyday I wake up at 04h30. So I am in the office before 06h00; so by 08h00, the time I would usually come to work, I have already done a lot of work. And that gives me the opportunity to leave earlier in the afternoon..."*

*"Most days I work until 14h00 or 15h00 and then go home. I usually go jogging and when I return I actually switch on my laptop and do some more work... These are the kind of things that are important to me..."*

*"... It gives me the opportunity to leave earlier in the afternoon... It is so much better than working in the banking industry for example, where my friends have to be at work at 08h00 and can only leave at 17h00... no flexibility."*

Designated employees also appreciate the technology that is made available to them to enable them the flexibility to work remotely: *"... I switch on my laptop and do some more work. I really like that [the organisation] makes it possible for us to connect at home."*

Another aspect of flexibility that designated employees comment on is in response to their work deliverables. They enjoy the fact that the work environment is not too structured. Participants stated in this regard:

*"... I was given a job and left to my own devices to complete the task in time. Nobody asked me where I am or what I am doing. It was my responsibility to ensure that my work is done on time and according to the right standards... Being left to my own devices was such a good thing."*

Designated employees identify the flexibility of the work environment as a key retention factor within the organisation: *"When the demon comes... you know the demon that comes with an*

*alternative job offer... these are the things that I think about and keeps me with [the organisation]".*

Designated employees find their environment exciting as it provides excellent opportunities for both learning and skills development. Project work provides varied experience and gives employees an opportunity to expand and grow their skill set and they are eager to learn. Training courses are of a high standard and the volumes of e-learning courses available to all employees are seen as a big advantage. Participants stated:

*"...the prospects of learning within [the organisation] is amazing, there are so many opportunities to develop myself..."*

*"...I must be the person who has done the most e-learning courses in [the organisation]..."*

*"...the course was so meaningful, both on a professional and personal level, that it changed my perception..."*

*"...I have worked on seven different projects in different industries; this excited me as I was given a lot of opportunity to grow. I have grown a lot in terms of understanding business".*

*"...this excited me as I was given a lot of opportunity to grow."*

*"...he is teaching me and I want to learn..."*

Designated employees comment that a hard working culture exists within the business unit: *"...everyone is putting in the long hours, working over the weekends and in the evenings."* It seems that some of the more junior designated employees feel compelled to adopt this work culture: *"As his mentee I had to work the same hours as he is teaching me and I want to learn... So I had to fall in with his routine."* Designated employees comment positively on the high standard of work within the business unit. They report that these high standards inspire them to produce work of equal quality: *"I am working on this project right now with a new lady that joined [the organisation]. She is fantastic, so good at what she does and it is so good to work with these kinds of people. So, you know, I don't want to disappoint her, so when work gets allocated to me I make sure that I do a really good job... But I have been in circumstances at other companies where the people you work with are just demons, then you just become a demon yourself and it is fine... no one is inspired to do better work."*

Designated employees work with contractors on most of their projects and they believe that contractors do not share the same work standards and ethics: "...*we are delivering the project with contractors and these individuals are not as committed to getting the job done and to the same standards*". Contractors also do not seem to do a good job when it comes to project management: "...*the project manager was not from [the organisation], she was a contractor. She was very bad; her attitude was terrible, but apparently not only to me.*" In one instance the behaviour of a contracting project manager was so bad that a designated employee resigned because of it: "*One of our junior consultants actually resigned because of the project manager. She wasn't resigning from [the organisation]; she was resigning from that project manager*".

Participants also relate instances where designated employees have approached contractors for assistance and guidance, only to be rebuffed: "*When I approached one of the contractors for advice and guidance, I was told to 'go to the SAP Academy' to find answers*".

This is in sharp contrast to designated employees' views on the support and guidance they receive from their project team members: "... *I didn't feel comfortable asking anyone of them the questions that were milling around in my head... then I was assigned to a project... and everyone was so helpful and supportive.*"

Designated employees explain that initially the project environment was very different from what they expected: "*But when I started my first project I realised it was a different scenario altogether*". Projects are described as being challenging and very demanding: "... *I was thrown in at the deep end.*" "...*I was working on a very demanding project ...*"

An important aspect of any project is teamwork. Designated employees seem to have mixed feelings regarding the teamwork in the organisation. On the one hand they find working with competent team members very motivating "... *it is so good to work with these kinds of people*". Under these circumstances it is important for designated employees not to let the team down: "... *I don't want to let my team members down*"; and they are inspired to deliver high quality work: "... *inspired to do better work*". They stress the positive influence that team members can have on the work of an individual, but they also report how destructive it can be if the team does not work well together. There seem to be plenty of examples of poor teamwork: instances where team members have to carry the work load of members who are not pulling their weight; where

an employee is left to do all the work on her own when the rest of the team members go away on holiday; or where there are very negative interactions between team members constituting a lot of criticism and no constructive feedback. If this behaviour is not addressed it becomes very demotivating for the whole team. Participants stated the following in this regard:

*"...The other project team members had to do extra work to cover what this individual was responsible for, but this individual's behaviour on the project was never addressed and it demotivated our whole team."*

*"...I still had to do all the work on my own. My team members deserted me..."*

*"I ended up working over the weekends while other people were not."*

*"One individual on our project would never get involved but would always be criticising what we were doing or how we were doing it, but never offered any constructive feedback."*

### **Theme 3: Poor orientation and integration into the business unit**

Many designated employees commented on the lack of proper orientation on joining the organisation and how it adversely impacted them in the first few months. Designated employees would have liked to receive guidance regarding various issues. First and foremost they would have liked to know who to go to when they have questions or queries. Participants explain:

*"When I first joined I didn't know anybody in the business unit and nobody knew me or knew that I was a graduate. I sat upstairs at one of the hot-desks and all these consultants were sitting around me, but I didn't feel comfortable asking anyone of them the questions that were milling around in my head."*

*"When I first joined it happened to me often that I asked the wrong people and therefore received the wrong information."*

As many of the designated employees are still young and relatively new to the business unit, they do not have a network of people to draw on when they require guidance and orientation therefore becomes crucial: *"... I didn't know that many people."*

Designated employees would have appreciated better orientation regarding the many processes and procedures that they are required to adhere to in the business unit. Participants' response in this regard:

*"...all these processes and admin that I had to complete, but because I wasn't inducted into [the organisation] I didn't know what to do with it. 'What is a PDF?' 'What is an IDP' I didn't even know about the website..."*

*"All the different processes made me feel lost"*

Similarly designated employees would have liked an awareness of the different tools that are utilised in the business unit and they would have liked training on the tools that they are required to use as they find them confusing. Some of the responses in this regard:

*"I had to go into the tool to submit leave in the system and I got completely lost."*

*"It was a few weeks after I had joined that I was told that I had to submit a timesheet electronically. Before that we had paper-based timesheets in Excel where you type in the hours and it generates the timesheets. I didn't know what ILC was or how to use it..."*

*"I did not even know what ILC was. Nobody ever told me about it or showed me how to use it."*

Importantly, designated employees report that they would have appreciated some form of guidance on how to be a consultant and how to deal with difficult situations: *"I didn't know how to act professionally under these circumstances. So I tried to absorb and listen and say the right things, but I wish someone could have provided me with guidance. In the first few weeks at [the organisation] we were taught about the processes, but I wish someone would have taught me how to be a consultant, what to say, how to act in difficult situations. Of course later you learn how to deal with these things, but the first few weeks were very hard for me."*

Due to the lack of orientation, designated employees believe that they have had to teach themselves all the important things that they needed to know to integrate into the business unit. This stretches from having to read up on complicated processes, learning how to use the multitude of tools and learning how to deal with difficult circumstances in a professional manner. While designated employees do not appear to be resentful about this fact, they do report that it has caused some alienation and feelings of neglect and that it would have been less time consuming and more productive for this information and guidance to have come from the business. Response from participants in this regard:

*"...This particular process was a little complicated, it involved a lot of reading up and understanding and they would use this terminology that I didn't understand. I would click on the help button, but even the help button couldn't explain the concept to me."*

*"So I had to go and find someone to teach me how to use this system which I have never heard of before."*

*"Of course, later you learn how to deal with these things, but the first few weeks were very hard for me"*

*"...But eventually I found these things out for myself... So I felt a bit neglected ."*

*"Everything I know I had to learn myself or ask people for information."*

Designated employees also commented on how difficult it is to find information in the business unit. An incredible volume of information resides within the organisation and this information can be very powerful, however it is their experience that the information does not reside in one central place but is typically scattered across the organisation. *"... I was sent from pillar to post to get pricing information"*. Hunting down information in the organisation is very time consuming and designated employees believe the time could be much better spent elsewhere: *"This obviously wasted a lot of time that I could have been productive..."* Understanding how to tap into the knowledge base is an important part of integrating into the business unit and functioning as a consultant. Yet employees are left to find that out for themselves.

#### **Theme 4: Demanding consultant role**

Designated employees seem to be functioning under a lot of pressure. Their work life seems to be very demanding as the project environment places a lot of pressure on designated employees, not least of which from a time perspective. Some of the responses in this regard:

*"...We were working under time constraints and the client kept asking for changes to the deliverables.*

*"When I had to write a proposal, I was working under huge time pressure..."*

*"I didn't have time to do that due to the huge demands on the project..."*

It seems that designated employees sometimes struggle to balance all the demands placed on them. One participant relates: *"... At one point last year I was working on a very demanding project, but I also had to go to Sales School. As part of the course I had to organise role-play calls with different managers within the organisation, but I didn't have time to do that due to the huge demands on the project..."*

In addition designated employees also refer to a huge sense of pressure not to make mistakes at clients' sites. Participants state:

*"...because if I failed, in the client's eyes the organisation would be a failure."*

*"On my first project for [the organisation] I felt under a lot of pressure because there is not room for error in [the organisation]..."*

It seems that designated employees are very concerned about the impression that they create with others. They report that it is important for them to create a good impression with managers and their colleagues: *"...I don't want to disappoint"*. They want others to know that they take their work seriously: *"I didn't want it to look as though I wasn't serious about my job."* This desire extends beyond project work to other areas within their working life: *"... it was made out that I didn't take the course seriously."* In line with this desire to make a good impression comes the uncertainty of what is expected of them and whether they will be able to live up to this expectation: *"I moved across from another division in [the organisation] and initially I felt very anxious...I wasn't sure if I was ready for it..."* It becomes clear that it is very important for designated employees to be perceived as being reliable: *"...the biggest compliment you can get in the organisation is to be called a "safe pair of hands".*

Being reliable implies a willingness to take responsibility. Designated employees feel empowered by the responsibility they are afforded in the workplace. Insight into this theme comes from the following anecdotes:

*"I remember when I first started working at the business unit, I expected it would be a very structured environment where I would be working nine-to-five, churning out work for the man.. you know... The MAN. But then what happened was that I was given a job and left to my own devices to complete the task in time. Nobody asked me where I am or what I am doing. It was my responsibility to ensure that my work is done on time and according to the right standards... Being left to my own devices was such a good thing."*

Designated employees also take responsibility for their own development: *"The prospects of learning within [the organisation] are amazing; there are so many opportunities to develop myself. At the end of the day it is entirely up to me if I make use of these opportunities."* And they are eager to learn as demonstrated by the following excerpts:

*"...he is teaching me and I want to learn..."*

*"...I must be the person who has done the most e-learning courses available in [the organisation]"*

### **Theme 5: Dissatisfaction with careers**

Designated employees feel that a disconnect exists between the career that they would like to pursue and the work that the organisation expects them to do. They don't feel as if they have any influence over the type of projects on which they are placed and often these projects do not correspond with their overall career objectives. In some respects they feel the organisation is turning a blind eye to their career plans. Participants stated in this regard:

*"I have a certain direction that I want my career to grow and I discussed this with my people manager at the beginning of the year. But then [the organisation] had a project and they needed a resource, so I was deployed on this project that didn't correspond with my career objectives."*

*"...he left [the organisation] for the exact reason that he wanted to grow his career in a specific direction, but he kept being put on projects that he didn't want."*

*"Recently, more and more, my manager is giving me tasks that I don't really want to do."*

As a result, designated employees are feeling frustrated with the lack of direction to their careers:

*"...I keep telling myself that I have to learn patience with the company. But still I find myself thinking: 'Oh my goodness, where is my career going?'"*

Designated employees also discuss their inability to ensure that they are placed on billable projects and yet this aspect can impact their work life quite dramatically. Participants relate:

*"Last year I was working on a project, but I wasn't billable and because of that the organisation would not give me a 3G card. In effect this meant that I couldn't work. I couldn't tell when clients had scheduled meetings, I couldn't access my emails and I couldn't find information when I needed it. I actually had to drive around between the client and the office everyday at lunchtime or after work to connect to the network and do my job. And all of this was out of my control. I was just trying to do my job."*

When it comes to advancing their careers in the organisation, designated employees have serious concerns. They don't feel that they are able to create the opportunities required to gain experience in crucial areas that are required for promotion. Participants' response in this regard:

*“Last year I completed an IDP and a PDFA and it was made clear to me that I need to acquire these skills that related to both core and dimension capabilities before I could progress my career. So I set these targets for the year along with my manager, only to find that circumstances prevented me from making these targets. I wasn’t presented with the opportunity to actually realise my targets and as a result I did not get a promotion...”*

*“Last year I had to write proposals as part of my PDFA as I was working towards a promotion. I didn’t know about any proposals at the time and I don’t think my manager knew when proposals were being written either, so she could not make it happen for me. In the end I never wrote the proposal and couldn’t move to the next level in the PDFA, which meant I wasn’t promoted.”*

*“So circumstances beyond my control actually impacts on my career growth.”*

Designated employees are looking to their managers to assist with shaping their careers: *“This year three of the people who play an important role in my career has resigned from [the organisation]. My project manager, who was also the leader of my group and the person who recruited me into [the organisation]; he had a plan for my career going forward. Then both my mentor and my people manager resigned as well. They knew my background and where we were planning to go with my career, now I don’t know what will happen going forward.”* At the moment designated employees do not seem to have confidence in their managers’ ability to influence their career. They are concerned about the way they are deployed on projects as it influence their skills: *“...I am concerned when I see how I am deployed on projects. In the past year I have been pushed around from one project to another without being given the stability to complete a full lifecycle of an implementation.”*

They feel that managers are ignoring their career objectives in favour of ensuring that all projects are resourced as quickly and effortlessly as possible. This devalues their contribution to the organisation. They also question their manager’s ability to positively influence their careers. Responses from participants in this regard;

*“I have a certain direction that I want my career to grow and I discussed this with my people manager at the beginning of the year. But then [the organisation] had a project and they needed a resource, so I was deployed on this project that didn’t correspond with my career objectives”*

*“I realise that the opportunities are out there, but I am not aware of them. This experience last year made me realise that my manager does not have control over these things either.”*

This leads designated employees to a sense of concern about who can affect the changes that are required for their career progression.

Designated employees equate career progression with money. The lack of career progression is therefore impacting on their compensation and it is a source of frustration for designated employees. The following excerpts highlight:

*“...And to me, career growth is linked to money.”*

*“Money is not everything, but having financial freedom is very important to me.”*

#### **Theme 6: Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile**

Designated employees spend the majority of their time working on projects at client site. Most designated employees report that they experience their clients as difficult. Clients are reported as being rude, displaying bad attitudes, attributing blame and not acting in a consistent manner. Some of the responses in this regard were:

*“I have just been on a project where the client had incredible mood swings, he would walk-in in the morning and not even bother to greet me, but five minutes later he would be joking with me.”*

*“This lady was appointed as the process owner at one of the divisions and one of her responsibilities was to approve transports that had to go through. I contacted her to ask her to approve some of these transports for ‘configs’ that I have done and she responded to me in such a rude manner... she made me feel that if I was close enough to her she would have done something to me.”*

*“I had a difficult project where things would get personal sometimes.”*

*“The client would become unhappy and adopt an attitude of ‘who do you think you are?’”*

*“...we actually had to physically go to the office of the client manager to get sign-off because if we sent it and there were any delays in getting the sign-off and the printing done, the client would have blamed [the organisation].”*

Designated employees view their clients as demanding and sometimes unreasonable. It is their experience that clients can sometimes send very confusing signals. The excerpts below highlight:

*"We were working under time constraints and the client kept asking for changes to the deliverables."*

*"I was at a client who kept saying one thing, but then wanted something else."*

*"...the client wanted the report ASAP."*

Yet clients are also known to neglect their own responsibilities: *"She said to me: SAP is not one of my priorities; I don't specialise in SAP."*

In response designated employees are not always sure how to deal with clients: *"I tried to absorb and listen and say the right things, but I wish someone would have taught me how to be a consultant."* Sometimes their inexperience with dealing with difficult clients means that they go beyond what is required of them in order to ensure that things run smoothly at the client: *"On my last project there were so many things that I did for the client that was actually out of scope, just to keep the client happy."*

### **Theme 7: Involved management style**

Designated employees generally seem satisfied with the level of interaction they have with their managers. Response from participants in this regard:

*"I was very surprised when I first joined [the organisation] to see that my manager often met with me informally at my desk."*

*"When I first joined I met with my manager on a regular basis"*

There were isolated reports of managers not making themselves available to their employees: *"My colleague's People Manager never returns emails, never returns phone calls, always with the excuse that he is extremely busy on projects. My colleague is feeling very frustrated."* But overall designated employees seem content with the level of interaction with their managers and they have a sense that their managers take an interest in them personally: *"...it is not just about the work that I can churn out; my manager actually cares about me."*

When it comes to the level of support and guidance that designated employees are receiving from their managers, there seem to be conflicting views. Some employees comment on the valuable guidance, direction and help that they have been receiving from their managers.

*"I asked my manager on the project to assist and together we decided a course of action."*

*“My manager gave me a lot of valuable guidance, so I didn’t have to struggle...”*

*“...I picked up the phone and phoned our Knowledge Manager and she talked me through the process and I was able to give the client the report they needed...”*

*“My manager helped me fix the deliverable.”*

*“...we had a lot of discussions around what [the organisation] would require of me and similarly what I would expect from [the organisation]. I like the clear sense of direction.*

Others share incidents where they would have appreciated more support and guidance from their managers. This seems to be especially important at times when designated employees are experiencing difficult situations: Some responses from participants:

*“One of our junior consultants actually resigned because of this project manager. She wasn’t resigning from [the organisation], she was resigning from that project manager.”*

*“I didn’t know how to act professionally under these circumstances. So I tried to absorb and listen and say the right things, but I wish someone could have provided me with guidance.*

Recognition for work well done is a highly motivating factor for designated employees. Participants state:

*“[The organisation] is a big organisation but when I did a good job on a recent project, I was recognised and compensated for the excellent work and it is nice to receive such recognition even in a big organisation.*

*“...everyone was impressed by the way it was run and my ability to handle the crowd. I was congratulated by so many people and it felt good. Even the big boss said it was good.”*

It seems important, however, that recognition is only given where it is due: *“...I still had to do the work on my own. My team members deserted me. So when the project congratulations came around, it came to me.”*

Designated employees also comment on the importance for managers to effectively manage their employees’ performance. The importance of feedback should never be underestimated. Designated employees want regular fair feedback on whether their performance is good or bad:

*“On one of the smaller projects that I was involved in the project manager never gave me any feedback... until I delivered and then he said: Oh, you should have...”*

And they stress that poor performance in team members must be addressed without delay. Failure to do so will lead to resentment and de-motivation of the rest of the team: “...*this individual’s behaviour on the project was never addressed and it de-motivated our whole team.*”

## **DISCUSSION**

In South Africa, males dominate a significant portion of the society power structure (Hofstede, n.d.). This domination of power structures is reflected in the business unit’s diversity profile, with white males filling all the senior positions in the organisation and designated employees only occupying positions in the lower grading. The general objective of this research is to explore the experience of designated employees within this environment. Seven themes were identified that relate to the overall experience of designated employees in a consulting business unit. They are discussed below.

### **A debilitating organisational culture**

Designated employees experience the overall organisational culture as restrictive, lacking warmth and support.

They find the organisation to be extremely bureaucratic, evident not only in the multitude of policies and procedures that are in place, but also because the organisation is slow to adapt to changes. The processes and tools that are in use are not user friendly and place an unnecessary administrative burden on the individual. According to McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) management by formal and impersonal policies and procedures is typically used in White dominated firms and is in sharp contrast with an Afrocentric style of management. The bureaucratic nature of the organisation is in line with Harrison and Stokes (1992) role culture which is typified by an environment that values administrative order, dependence, rationality and constancy. It also aligns with Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1979) climate of conformity.

Designated employees experience a lack of awareness and respect for different cultures in the organisation. According to Cox and Blake (1991) employees will naturally prefer an environment that is culturally sensitive and are therefore more likely to be attracted to an

organisation (and more likely to be retained) if they see their cultural background valued rather than ignored or disparaged (Iles & Hayers, 1997). According to Petersen and Vermeulen (1999) an openness and awareness of the needs of diverse groups contributes to a positive organisational climate that is crucial for the successful management of diversity. Managing diversity is a process for developing an environment that foster awareness and value and accepts individual differences (Daniel, 1994). Culture was also cited as a reason for leaving in the exit interviews conducted with designated employees in the business unit.

Designated employees describe the atmosphere in the organisation as impersonal and cold, which sometimes leads to feelings of isolation. According to Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1979) this indicates a climate lacking in warmth and support. The perception exists amongst designated employees that friendliness is not a valued norm in the organisation.

The use of acronyms is an artefact of the culture within the organisation. Designated employees report that it serves to alienate employees and points to a climate lacking warmth and support (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). According to Mavin and Girling (2000) both tangible and intangible dimensions should be included when managing diversity in order to promote an organisational climate where members feel valued. Furthermore designated employees also comment that mistakes are not tolerated within the organisation. This is indicative of a high-power distance culture where leaders act as parents and employees are chastised for mistakes (Hofstede, 2001).

Designated employees are concerned with the way information is shared within the organisation and they don't believe the organisation is always open and honest with employees. The poor flow of information aligns with the role culture described by Harrison and Stokes (1992). According to McEnrue (1993) and Miller, Fields, Kumar, and Ortis (2000) in order to successfully manage diversity, effective communication and a culture that promotes openness are essential.

Designated employees do not feel as though they are receiving the necessary support from the organisation. They find it difficult to know who to contact when they are in need of support and

even when they do find the right person they do not find them to be efficient or reliable. This lack of assistance points to a climate lacking warmth and support (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979), while the need for more structure can be indicative of a strong level of uncertainty avoidance present amongst designated employees (Hofstede, 2001).

### **A constructive work environment**

Designated employees' work environment primarily constitutes project work, but also refers to the work environment within the business unit. Their experience of their work environment is mostly positive, which is in sharp contrast to their view of the organisation.

Designated employees enjoy the fact that their work is mostly unstructured with a high level of flexibility in terms of work hours, working remotely and managing their own work products. Designated employees' ability to manage themselves aligns with a performance culture as defined by Harrison and Stokes (1992) and a low power-distance culture where there is more trust in subordinates. The flexibility afforded is indicative of a climate that lacks conformity, which is contrary to designated employees' experience of the organisation as a whole. (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979).

Designated employees believe their environment provides good opportunities for development and growth, both through on-the-job experience and learning opportunities. According to Reyneke (2006) the successful management of diversity is dependant on a culture that promotes the personal development of its employees.

In addition, their work environment is characterised by long hours and high work standards. Designated employees seem to find reward in their work. This degree of commitment and personal satisfaction obtained from their work aligns with a performance culture (Harrison & Stokes, 1992) and the emphasis on quality performance points to a climate of standards as described by Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1979).

Designated employees have a very negative perception of the contractors working with them on projects. They believe they do not share the same work ethics and therefore do not share in the

climate of standards that are evident within the designated employees' work environment (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979).

Designated employees believe their project environments can be fun, but it is typically characterised as a high pressure, stressful environment. On projects, designated employees seem to receive the support and guidance that they require from their team members. It seems therefore that in the project environment a climate of warmth and support exists (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979).

They believe that a healthy team spirit exists with examples of strong and bonded teamwork. At times, however, when the pressure becomes too much there are instances where a breakdown in teamwork occurs and team members do not take responsibility for their tasks. This is characteristic of an individualistic team where the individual is responsible for an outcome. In collectivist teams, the team tasks are not considered the responsibility of an individual, but of the team (Holt & Wigginton, 2002). It seems that the pressure experienced on projects can impact on the climate of warmth and support that designated employees believe generally exists.

Designated employees' experience of their immediate work environment seems very different from their experience of the organisation as a whole. Their work environment is characterised by flexibility which is very different from the process-driven nature of the organisation. Their work environment seems to be more closely aligned to a performance culture, with a focus on high standards. There is plenty of evidence of a climate of warmth and support which designated employees found lacking in the organisation.

### **Poor orientation and integration into the business unit**

Designated employees are not satisfied with the orientation provided in the business unit and believe it impacts negatively on employees' functioning in the organisation. They believe better structured induction sessions and orientation will better equip employees for their roles. According to Laroche (2003) workplace uncertainty avoidance translates into the amount of information that is perceived to be needed. Strong uncertainty avoidance implies discomfort with unfamiliar situations; individuals want guidance for any situation they might face (Lere & Portz,

2005). Designated employees' need for detailed orientation seems to be indicative of relatively strong uncertainty avoidance. Designated employees report that it was left to them to address the lack of orientation and in the end, they had to teach themselves all that they needed to know.

A wealth of information exists within the organisation and the intellectual capital is one of the organisation's major competitive advantages. The frustration that designated employees experience, however, is that it is very difficult to leverage this information because it is scattered across different repositories and tools. This wastes a lot of precious time and in effect renders the information meaningless.

The lack of formal orientation and well structured information demonstrated in this theme leaves employees confused and points to a climate that lacks organisational clarity (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Both of these issues also point to a relatively strong level of uncertainty avoidance present amongst designated employees (Hofstede, 2001).

### **Demanding consultant role**

Designated employees experience a lot of pressure in their role as consultants. They experience the project environment as very demanding and report that they are often placed under huge time constraints. In addition, they also suffer from added pressure not to make any mistakes. It seems designated employees are very concerned about the impression they create at work; it is important for them that others will have a good impression of them and the quality of their work. This desire may be adding to the pressure they are experiencing. This inner anxiety and stress associated with the primacy of work and the need for personal performance aligns strongly with Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty avoidance (Morden, 1995).

Designated employees feel empowered when it comes to their work; they enjoy the responsibility that is afforded them and they take ownership for their own development. This degree of commitment is in line with Harrison & Stokes performance culture (Harrison & Stokes, 1992). The control afforded to the individual regarding their work also aligns with Hofstede's dimension of individualism (Hofstede, 2001). According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (Robbins, 1998), the responsibility afforded to designated employees in their

work will have a positive impact on their job satisfaction. This sense of empowerment aligns with the climate dimension of responsibility (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). The value that designated employees place on empowerment is indicative of Hofstede's dimension of low power distance (Madzar, 2005).

### **Dissatisfaction with careers**

Designated employees are unhappy with the state of their careers. They seem to have a clear sense of the direction that they would like to grow their careers, but in their experience the organisation expects them to do just any type of work that becomes available. This is indicative of a high power-distance culture in the organisation as designated employees lack participation in the decision-making regarding project placement (Hofstede, 2001). As a result of this lack of influence, designated employees are feeling frustrated with the direction that their careers are taking. The lack of career path was also cited as a reason for leaving in the exit interviews conducted with designated employees in the business unit.

Designated employees also have serious concerns about the advancement of their careers. They encounter obstacles to career progression that mainly relate to lack of experience. As stated before, they have no control over their placements on projects and therefore have no ability to create the opportunities to gain the necessary experience. This theme is evident in the diversity profile of the business unit which clearly shows a lack of progression of designated employees beyond a certain level in the organisation. The emphasis on ambition and the importance of career progression reflected in this theme align strongly with a masculine culture (Hofstede, 2001). According to Lere and Portz (2005) employees in masculine cultures emphasise performance and growth.

Designated employees are looking to their managers to assist with shaping and advancement of their careers. They believe that managers should assist in addressing the obstacles that prevent them from growing their careers. Yet, it seems to designated employees that their managers also don't have the power to positively influence the situation, which leaves them feeling despondent. According to Reyneke (2006) if an organisation is very rule-orientated (as theme 1 seems to

indicate that this organisation is) it is likely that managers will not have the delegated authority to influence issues like career progression.

Designated employees directly relate career advancement with financial gain and the current lack of career progression is a huge source of frustration for designated employees. The importance of financial gain is in line with a masculine culture that places a high degree of value on material success and wealth. According to Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory, remuneration and benefits are external factors that are associated with job dissatisfaction (Robbins, 1998) and will cause employees to leave the organisation if they feel they are not properly rewarded (Radloff, 2005).

### **Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile**

Designated employees experience their clients as difficult; they are known to display rude behaviour, have bad attitudes and do not act in a consistent manner. They find their clients to be demanding, sometimes even unreasonable. At times, clients neglect their own responsibilities yet they are quick to attribute blame.

In response, however, designated employees admit that they have trouble deciphering the confusing signals from their clients. They are sometimes not too sure how to deal with their clients and report that they will go beyond what is required of them to ensure that the client is happy. This seems to indicate a strong uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001) as the volatile, sometimes whimsical and ever changing nature of a typical client seems to create some apprehension and even distress with designated employees. It seems that designated employees lack the experience to deal with difficult clients.

### **Involved management style**

According to McFarlin and Coster (1999), cultural and contextual differences between groups can contribute to large perception gaps with respect to how employees should be led, motivated and developed. Designated employees, however, report satisfaction with the level of interaction that they have with their managers. There are isolated incidents where managers have stated that they are too busy to make themselves available, but overall designated employees feel that their

managers take an active and personal interest in them. This interaction points to a climate of warmth and support (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). According to Hofstede (2001) in feminine cultures managers show care for their followers and nurture good relationships with them (Fam & Merrilees, 1998). It is also characteristic of the Harrison and Stokes (1992) support culture where employees believe they are regarded as valuable human beings. This approach seems conducive to the management of diversity as according to Van Vuuren (2008) any attempt to deal with diversity in the organisation needs to be based on a mutual respect for each other in accordance with the basic laws of caring. According to Geldenhuys (2006) Afrocentric leadership is characterised by a deliberate emphasis on people and their dignity.

There are some conflicting views regarding the level of support and guidance designated employees are receiving from their managers. Some report that they always get valuable support and help, while others seem to need more guidance. This willingness of designated employees to accept direction from other qualified individuals, points to a climate of leadership in the organisation (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). As mentioned before, the high need for structure and guidance points to strong uncertainty avoidance amongst designated employees (Hofstede, 2001).

Recognition is important for designated employees and they confirm that it is highly motivating when recognition is given where it is due. According to Chambers (2001) employees want to know that management recognises their time and contributions. While money is a foolproof way to show appreciation, recognition through non-financial means also has an impact on employee morale (Manas, 1998). The fact that designated employees feel that they are being recognised for good work points to a climate of reward (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). The value that recognition and reward hold for designated employees points to a masculine culture. According to Lere and Portz (2005) employees in masculine cultures believe work is central to life and view job recognition as very important. This aligns with an individualistic culture where employees strive for personal achievement and recognition (Reyneke, 2006). According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, the recognition received will positively impact on designated employees' job satisfaction (Robbins, 1998)

Designated employees also comment on the importance of effective performance management and the need for regular feedback on their performance. According to Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001) employee development implies providing feedback and coaching to employees regarding their strengths and weaknesses. Feedback should be timely; should there be poor performance on a team it should be addressed immediately to avoid other team members becoming de-motivated. This is indicative of a low power-distance culture where performance is seen as individual (Reyneke, 2006). The need for regular feedback also indicates the strong uncertainty avoidance from designated employees which has been evident throughout the study (Hofstede, 2001).

It would seem that management in the business unit adopt a more feminine culture, showing care for their employees and nurturing good relationships with them. This can run counter to the masculine tendencies displayed by designated employees, placing emphasis on ambition, advancement and performance. See the Appendix for a summary of the extracted themes aligned with the culture and climate dimensions.

In summarising the discussion, the following conclusions are derived from the study:

- Designated employees find the overall organisational culture prohibiting. The organisational culture shows strong alignment with Harrison and Stokes' role culture which values administrative order, dependence and predictability and is characterised by a poor flow of information in the organisation (Harrison & Stokes, 1992). They find the climate in the organisation to be based on conformity, with many externally imposed constraints in the form of processes and policies and lacking warmth and support (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). They believe the organisation is insensitive to cultural differences and experience the atmosphere as cold and impersonal, made worse by the prevalent use of acronyms which are not understood by all. Designated employees believe the organisation does not provide them with the necessary support, further pointing to a climate lacking warmth and support. The paternalistic approach to mistakes is indicative of a high power distance within the organisation (Hofstede, 2001). Their experience of the organisational culture leads designated employees to feel removed

(disaffected) which has significant implications for the successful management of diversity in the organisation. According to Petersen and Vermeulen (1999) in order to successfully manage diversity the organisation needs to focus on the creation of an environment that supports belonging and excludes barriers to the fulfilment of human potential.

- Designated employees have a far more positive view of their immediate work environment. They enjoy the flexibility of their work, the opportunities for development and the climate of warmth and support that exists on the projects (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). They find the high standards of work inspiring and believe mostly good teamwork exists. The performance culture (Harrison & Stokes, 1992) that typifies their work environment seems more agreeable to designated employees. The work environment seems to provide many positive aspects (like the opportunities for growth and development) that can be leveraged to successfully manage diversity in the organisation (Reyneke, 2006).
- Designated employees believe the lack of a detailed orientation programme is a big drawback in the organisation. They believe better orientation regarding policies and procedures, processes and tools and guidance on how to be a consultant would have assisted them in better performance of their jobs. Instead they had to find out all these things for themselves. Designated employees also commented on the lack of structured, easily accessible information in the organisation. This need for structure and guidance points to a strong uncertainty avoidance present amongst designated employees and to a climate lacking organisational clarity (Hofstede, 2001; Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979).
- Designated employees seem to be experiencing high levels of anxiety in their role as consultants due to the pressurised nature of their work and their wish to impress others. This is indicative of a strong need for uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). Designated employees report feeling empowered with regards to their work and their own development, which has a positive impact on their job satisfaction and aligns with the characteristics of a Harrison and Stokes (1992) performance culture. The sense of

empowerment points to a climate of responsibility (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). The value that designated employees attribute to empowerment is characteristic of a low power-distance orientation (Hofstede, 2001).

- Designated employees are frustrated about the way their careers are currently being managed in the organisation. Their lack of ability to influence the direction their career is taking is indicative of a high power-distance culture within the organisation (Hofstede, 2001). Designated employees also encounter obstacles in advancing their careers in the organisation, which causes frustration as they are ambitious and would like to see their careers grow. They expect their managers to assist with their career advancement, but it seems that they lack the power to positively influence the situation. This is evident in the diversity profile of the business unit that clearly shows a lack of progression of designated employees beyond a certain level in the organisation. Career advancement also equates to financial gain and adds an extra level of frustration for designated employees. Designated employees' ambition, the importance their career holds for them and the importance of material success are all indicative of a strong masculine culture (Hofstede, 2001; Lere & Portz, 2005).
- Designated employees experience their clients as difficult and demanding. They admit that they have trouble deciphering the confusing signals they receive and that they are not always sure how to deal with clients. It seems that designated employees lack the experience of handling difficult clients as the volatile, ever changing nature of a typical client makes them feel uneasy. This indicates a strong uncertainty avoidance culture as defined by Hofstede (2001).
- Designated employees are satisfied with the level of interaction they have with their managers and feel their managers take a personal interest in them. This aligns with a climate of warmth and support and indicates a feminine culture displayed by managers (Hofstede, 2001). Some designated employees report that they receive valuable guidance and support from their managers, while others indicate that they would prefer more guidance. The willingness to accept guidance points to a climate of leadership (Kolb,

Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Designated employees report that their managers recognise them for good work and this is indicative of a climate of reward (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Designated employees' positive disposition towards recognition indicates a strong masculine as well as individualistic culture. The importance of feedback and performance management as reported by designated employees indicates a low power distance culture and a level of uncertainty avoidance present in designated employees (Hofstede, 2001). The possibility exists that management's feminine culture can run counter to the masculine culture displayed by designated employees.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The researcher set out to investigate the experience of designated employees which she defined as Black, Indian and Coloured employees. However, no Coloured employees took part in this study and as a result the findings are not representative of their experience in the business unit.

Designated employees based in Cape Town were excluded from the research due to logistical reasons. Designated employees from this geographical region may have markedly different experiences within the business unit.

The majority of the research participants were male (83%) and as a result the possibility exists that the experience of female designated employees are not adequately portrayed in the findings.

The results from this study are highly contextual as they are derived from narrative content very specific to the research organisation. As a result the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

This study only made use of anecdote circles as a data gathering method. Other methods like interviews and participant observation could have supplied additional information regarding designated employees' experience.

Designated employees in the business unit were all deployed on projects and as a result had busy schedules and limited time available. This resulted in not many employees participating in the study and this possibly impacted on the volume of anecdotes generated as participants were not willing to spend more than 90 minutes at the most taking part in the anecdote circles.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations linking to the problem statement:**

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings:

- The business unit should consider redesigning the orientation sessions for employees joining the business unit. It may not be possible to change the processes and procedures within a global organisation, but better education and training to provide an understanding of the processes and procedures as well as how to use the tools available will go a long way in addressing the feelings of alienation that designated employees are experiencing. These orientation sessions should include a socialisation component, to help employees learn about the culture of the organisation and make it easier for them to fit in (Radloff, 2005; Schultz et al., 2003). The orientation should also make employees aware of the resources that are available for them that will help make their integration easier, for instance, the Knowledge Manager that is available to all employees to help find relevant information.
- In addition, inexperienced employees should be teamed-up with an experienced 'buddy'. The role of the 'buddy' should be to act as informal guide and confidant for the inexperienced employee, giving advice and acting as a soundboard. The role of the 'buddy' should be formalised and 'buddies' should receive recognition for their work to ensure commitment to the role.
- Many of the designated employees joining the organisation have worked in industry prior to making the move into consulting. As a result these employees have good work

experience, but no background in consulting. The organisation should consider devising a foundational consulting skills course consisting of role-plays regarding different scenarios that consultants can expect to come across at clients' sites. This should help designated employees prepare for dealing with difficult clients.

- The organisation should consider running a cultural awareness programme to create awareness and provide information on the different cultures that exist within the organisation. Furthermore it should be ensured that any organisational function caters for all cultural needs.
- A tailored training course should be designed for People Managers, focusing on aspects like cultural awareness, how to provide effective feedback, communication skills and career management. People Managers should be made aware of the importance of planning, support and guidance to address the strong uncertainty avoidance that seems to be present in designated employees. The training should be mandatory for all people managers (existing and newly appointed).
- The development plan that every employee is required to complete annually should be tailored to include the experience required for a promotion to the next level. Managers should then be empowered to execute the development plans for each of their employees against the pipeline of work that will be available. This will ensure visibility of exposure that each employee requires and also provide a roadmap for employees to gain the experience required to progress to the next level in the organisation.
- The business unit should define a strategic diversity management plan.

#### **Recommendations for future research:**

- The organisation should continue to build on the narrative database that has now been established regarding the experiences of designated employees. Exit interviews could be restructured to make use of anecdote to provide better insight into the reasons why

designated employees leave the organisation. The narrative database can then be tracked and monitored for trends regarding the experience of designated employees.

- This qualitative study can serve as the basis of a future quantitative study. The themes identified in this study can be used to formulate hypotheses for quantitative research regarding designated employees in the organisation.
- In defining a strategic diversity management plan for the business unit, a situation analysis of existing conditions, practices, attitudes and skills in relation to diversity in the organisation is required (Van Vuuren, 2008). Results from this study can contribute to the baseline information required for the diversity management plan.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter comprises conclusions regarding the literature review and the empirical study. Thereafter, limitations are discussed, and lastly, recommendations and suggestions for future research are offered.

#### **3.1. CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, the following conclusions are derived from the study:

- Designated employees find it difficult to relate to the overall organisational culture which shows strong alignment with Harrison and Stokes' role culture which values administrative order, dependence and predictability and is characterised by a poor flow of information in the organisation (Harrison & Stokes, 1992). They find the climate in the organisation to be based on conformity, with many externally imposed constraints in the form of processes and policies and lacking warmth and support (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). They believe the organisation is insensitive to cultural differences and experience the atmosphere as cold and impersonal, made worse by the prevalent use of acronyms which are not understood by all. Designated employees believe the organisation does not provide them with the necessary support, further pointing to a climate lacking warmth and support. The paternalistic approach to mistakes is indicative of a high power distance within the organisation (Hofstede, 2001). Their experience of the organisational culture leads designated employees to feel removed (disaffected) which has significant implications for the successful management of diversity in the organisation. According to Petersen and Vermeulen (1999) in order to successfully manage diversity the organisation needs to focus on the creation of an environment that supports belonging and excludes barriers to the fulfilment of human potential.

- Designated employees have a far more positive view of their immediate work environment. They enjoy the flexibility of their work, the opportunities for development and the climate of warmth and support that exists on the projects (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). They find the high standards of work inspiring and believe mostly good teamwork exists. The performance culture (Harrison & Stokes, 1992) that typifies their work environment seems more agreeable to designated employees. The work environment seems to provide many positive aspects (like the opportunities for growth and development) that can be leveraged to successfully manage diversity in the organisation (Reyneke, 2006).
- Designated employees believe the lack of a detailed orientation programme is a big drawback in the organisation. They believe better orientation regarding policies and procedures, processes and tools and guidance on how to be a consultant would have assisted them in better performance of their jobs. Instead they had to find out all these things for themselves. Designated employees also commented on the lack of structured, easily accessible information in the organisation. This need for structure and guidance points to a strong uncertainty avoidance present amongst designated employees and to a climate lacking organisational clarity (Hofstede, 2001; Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979).
- Designated employees seem to be experiencing high levels of anxiety in their role as consultants due to the pressurised nature of their work and their wish to impress others. This is indicative of a strong need for uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). Designated employees report feeling empowered with regards to their work and their own development, which has a positive impact on their job satisfaction and aligns with the characteristics of a Harrison and Stokes (1992) performance culture. The sense of empowerment points to a climate of responsibility (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). The value that designated employees attribute to empowerment is characteristic of a low power-distance orientation (Hofstede, 2001).
- Designated employees are frustrated about the way their careers are currently being managed in the organisation. Their lack of ability to influence the direction their career is

taking is indicative of a high power-distance culture within the organisation (Hofstede, 2001). Designated employees also encounter obstacles in advancing their careers in the organisation, which causes frustration as they are ambitious and would like to see their careers grow. They expect their managers to assist with their career advancement, but it seems that they lack the power to positively influence the situation. This is evident in the diversity profile of the business unit that clearly shows a lack of progression of designated employees beyond a certain level in the organisation. Career advancement also equates to financial gain and adds an extra level of frustration for designated employees. Designated employees' ambition, the importance their career holds for them and the importance of material success are all indicative of a strong masculine culture (Hofstede, 2001; Lere & Portz, 2005).

- Designated employees experience their clients as difficult and demanding. They admit that they have trouble deciphering the confusing signals they receive and that they are not always sure how to deal with clients. It seems that designated employees lack the experience of handling difficult clients as the volatile, ever changing nature of a typical client makes them feel uneasy. This indicates a strong uncertainty avoidance culture as defined by Hofstede (2001).
- Designated employees are satisfied with the level of interaction they have with their managers and feel their managers take a personal interest in them. This aligns with a climate of warmth and support and indicates a feminine culture displayed by managers (Hofstede, 2001). Some designated employees report that they receive valuable guidance and support from their managers, while others indicate that they would prefer more guidance. The willingness to accept guidance points to a climate of leadership (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Designated employees report that their managers recognise them for good work and this is indicative of a climate of reward (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Designated employees' positive disposition towards recognition indicates a strong masculine as well as individualistic culture. The importance of feedback and performance management as reported by designated employees indicates a low power distance culture and a level of uncertainty avoidance present in designated

employees (Hofstede, 2001). The possibility exists that management's feminine culture can run counter to the masculine culture displayed by designated employees.

### **3.2. LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH**

The researcher set out to investigate the experience of designated employees which she defined as Black, Indian and Coloured employees. However, no Coloured employees took part in this study and as a result the findings are not representative of their experience in the business unit.

Designated employees based in Cape Town were excluded from the research due to logistical reasons. Designated employees from this geographical region may have markedly different experiences within the business unit.

The majority of the research participants were male (83%) and as a result the possibility exists that the experience of female designated employees are not adequately portrayed in the findings.

The results from this study are highly contextual as they are derived from narrative content very specific to the research organisation. As a result the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

This study only made use of anecdote circles as a data gathering method. Other methods like interviews and participant observation could have supplied additional information regarding designated employees' experience.

Designated employees in the business unit were all deployed on projects and as a result had busy schedules and limited time available. This resulted in not many employees participating in the study and this possibly impacted on the volume of anecdotes generated as participants were not willing to spend more than 90 minutes at the most taking part in the anecdote circles.

### **3.3. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

#### **3.3.1. Recommendations linking to the problem statement**

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings:

- The business unit should consider redesigning the orientation sessions for employees joining the business unit. It may not be possible to change the processes and procedures within a global organisation, but better education and training to provide an understanding of the processes and procedures as well as how to use the tools available will go a long way in addressing the feelings of alienation that designated employees are experiencing. These orientation sessions should include a socialisation component, to help employees learn about the culture of the organisation and make it easier for them to fit in (Radloff, 2005; Schultz et al., 2003). The orientation should also make employees aware of the resources that are available for them that will help make their integration easier, for instance, the Knowledge Manager that is available to all employees to help find relevant information.
- In addition, inexperienced employees should be teamed-up with an experienced 'buddy'. The role of the 'buddy' should be to act as informal guide and confidant for the inexperienced employee, giving advice and acting as a soundboard. The role of the 'buddy' should be formalised and 'buddies' should receive recognition for their work to ensure commitment to the role.
- Many of the designated employees joining the organisation have worked in industry prior to making the move into consulting. As a result these employees have good work experience, but no background in consulting. The organisation should consider devising a foundational consulting skills course consisting of role-plays regarding different scenarios that consultants can expect to come across at clients' sites. This should help designated employees prepare for dealing with difficult clients.

- The organisation should consider running a cultural awareness programme to create awareness and provide information on the different cultures that exist within the organisation. Furthermore it should be ensured that any organisational function caters for all cultural needs.
- A tailored training course should be designed for People Managers, focusing on aspects like cultural awareness, how to provide effective feedback, communication skills and career management. People Managers should be made aware of the importance of planning, support and guidance to address the strong uncertainty avoidance that seems to be present in designated employees. The training should be mandatory for all people managers (existing and newly appointed).
- The development plan that every employee is required to complete annually should be tailored to include the experience required for a promotion to the next level. Managers should then be empowered to execute the development plans for each of their employees against the pipeline of work that will be available. This will ensure visibility of exposure that each employee requires and also provide a roadmap for employees to gain the experience required to progress to the next level in the organisation.
- The business unit should define a strategic diversity management plan.

### **3.3.2. Recommendations for future research**

- The organisation should continue to build on the narrative database that has now been established regarding the experiences of designated employees. Exit interviews could be restructured to make use of anecdote to provide better insight into the reasons why designated employees leave the organisation. The narrative database can then be tracked and monitored for trends regarding the experience of designated employees.

- This qualitative study can serve as the basis of a future quantitative study. The themes identified in this study can be used to formulate hypotheses for quantitative research regarding designated employees in the organisation.
- In defining a strategic diversity management plan for the business unit, a situation analysis of existing conditions, practices, attitudes and skills in relation to diversity in the organisation is required (Van Vuuren, 2008). Results from this study can contribute to the baseline information required for the diversity management plan.

### **3.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter conclusions regarding the theoretical and empirical objectives were made. The limitations of the research were pointed out and recommendations were made for the organisation in which the study took place, as well as for future research.

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## Appendix

### Themes aligned with Culture and Climate Dimensions

| Number  | Super-ordinate Theme                                    | Theme                                                                                                                                                             | Culture Dimension (Hofstede)                                                   | Culture Dimensions (Harrison and Stokes) | Climate Dimension (Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre)                                               |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1 | A debilitating organisational culture                   | Bureaucracy<br>Processes<br>Insensitivity to cultural differences<br>Impersonal atmosphere<br>Use of acronyms<br>Mistakes<br>Communication<br>Ineffective support | High Power<br>Distance<br>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance                         | Role Culture                             | Climate of Conformity<br><br>Climate lacking Warmth and Support                             |
| Theme 2 | A constructive work environment                         | Flexibility<br>Learning<br>Work standards and ethics<br>Contractors<br>Project environment<br>Teamwork                                                            | Low Power Distance<br>Individualism                                            | Performance Culture                      | Climate lacking Conformity<br><br>Climate of Standards<br><br>Climate of Warmth and Support |
| Theme 3 | Poor orientation and integration into the business unit | Orientation<br>Self-teaching<br>Finding information                                                                                                               | Strong Uncertainty Avoidance                                                   |                                          | Climate lacking organisational clarity                                                      |
| Theme 4 | Demanding consultant role                               | Pressure<br>Impressions<br>Empowerment                                                                                                                            | Strong Uncertainty Avoidance<br>Individualism<br>Low Power Distance<br>Culture | Performance Culture                      | Climate of Responsibility                                                                   |

| Number  | Super-ordinate Theme                                        | Theme                                                                                                         | Culture Dimension (Hofstede)                                                                                | Culture Dimensions (Harrison and Stokes) | Climate Dimension (Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre)                               |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 5 | Dissatisfaction with careers                                | Career planning and direction<br>Career progression<br>Manager influence on career<br>Career and remuneration | High Power<br>Distance Culture<br>Masculinity                                                               |                                          |                                                                             |
| Theme 6 | Difficulty in handling the typical demanding client profile | Difficult clients<br>Demanding clients<br>Clients neglecting responsibilities<br>Interaction with clients     | Strong Uncertainty<br>Avoidance                                                                             |                                          |                                                                             |
| Theme 7 | Involved management style                                   | Interaction with managers<br>Manager guidance and support<br>Recognition<br>Managing performance              | Femininity<br>Strong Uncertainty<br>Avoidance<br>Masculinity<br>Individualism<br>Low Power Distance Culture | Support Culture                          | Climate of Warmth and Support<br>Climate of Leadership<br>Climate of Reward |