

**PERCEPTIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A
SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS ORGANISATION**

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Disorders, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree MSc Speech/Language Pathology

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ABSTRACT

South Africans are struggling to emerge from a disastrous history of apartheid which has resulted in cultural isolation and the development of mutually negative stereotypes, assumptions and misconceptions between cultures within the "New" South Africa. The country's current process of national transformation is evident in all spheres of life and some researchers predict that the level of success of intercultural communication in the South African workplace will have a direct effect on nation building and transformation in general South African society. The purpose of the study was to contribute to the knowledge base of perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace. The main aim was to investigate the perceptions of intercultural communication of a sample of black and white middle managerial level employees within a South African organisation. More specifically, the study aimed to investigate how black employees perceive their white colleagues' communication and how white employees perceive their black colleagues' communication. In addition, the study aimed to investigate how employees perceive their own communication skills as well as to identify the major aspects impacting on intercultural communication effectiveness within their organisation. A qualitative, interpretative design was employed. The use of a pre-determined structured questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed for perceptions to be tapped from both an etic and emic approach, respectively. Twenty-six black employees and 26 white employees, all employed at middle managerial level within a financial services organisation, participated in this study. The researcher conducted interviews with a number of key role players from the organisation to obtain an understanding of the organisational culture in which the study was conducted. The main finding of the study was that the complexity involved in the study of intercultural communication in South African business organisations is beyond the mere realm of linguistics, but stresses the importance of understanding the psychological attributes of employees and the various contexts in which intercultural communication takes place. It is believed that the results of this study add knowledge to the body of research on perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace. However, it is clear that there is a dire need for further research on intercultural communication in South African business organisations. Based on the findings in this study, numerous practical implications regarding training and support emerged.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Managing ethnoracial diversity advantageously, distinguishes the successful company from its competitors who remain frozen in the traditional ways of handling new challenges. Perhaps nowhere else in the world [are] conservative white business establishment[s] challenged to come to terms with a new socio-political environment so radically and quickly as in post-apartheid South Africa." (Adam, 2000, pp. xi)

Intercultural communication is a cutting-edge topic which falls within the field of, among others, interactional sociolinguistics. Scholars in this field believe that the circumstances of wider society affect and are affected by what occurs in everyday conversational encounters (Chick, 1995, 2000). People in a country such as South Africa, which is currently in the process of national integration and nation-building, need to realise that understanding intercultural communication is an important task (Hall, 1995; Ndoleriire, 2000).

Due to South Africa's history, as well as its multilingual and multicultural society, the challenges facing business organisations are extraordinary. On the one hand, South African organisations have to try and overcome the legacy of an apartheid past in which policies of linguistic and cultural isolation have given rise to mutually negative stereotypes and have hindered the development of mutual understanding and appreciation between various cultures. On the other hand, the same organisations are required to re-enter and compete in the international arena from which they were excluded for so long (Chick, 1995; Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995; Lategan, 1999; Steyn, 1993b).

"No one needs reminding of the fact that South Africa has long been a radically divided society. Attempting to entrench the historical advantage people of European descent had attained through the dynamics of colonialism, the apartheid government tried stubbornly, against historical inevitability, to maintain the exclusionary privileges of a white minority. The consequences for the South African people was a society polarised along various differentials such as race, class, gender and political ideology – many inequities were enforced and maintained by law, others operated on more intangible processes of exclusion." (Steyn and Van Zyl, 2001, pp. 17)

Apartheid was a system of strict racial classification which aimed for "separate development of the races" (Mitchell, 1998, pp. 8). South African law divided the population into four major racial categories: Africans (Blacks), Whites, Coloureds and

Asians. Africans refer to the indigenous majority of the population (75%) and are divided along ethnic or tribal lines into dozens of sub-groups. Whites comprise approximately 13% of the population and are primarily the descendants of Dutch, English, French and German settlers. Coloureds, who are descendants of early European settlers, slaves imported from the Dutch Indies and the indigenous people, comprise approximately 9% of the total population. Asians or Indians (3%) refer to descendants of migrants from the Indian subcontinent (Adam, 2000; Mitchell, 1998).

Apartheid purged the voting roster of all blacks and created a system of residential "townships" or "homelands" for all "non-whites" to live in. Approximately 3.5 million people were forced to relocate and as result, 75% of the population was forced to squeeze into 15% of the land, most of it unfarmable. Interracial marriage was banned and "non-whites" were required to carry identification at all times. All "non-whites" were forced to stay in their home areas after sundown, while those who did not obey these laws risked being jailed or at least fined. Schools were segregated and a racial hierarchy of schooling emerged, with whites as recipients of education equivalent to First World standards, followed by Indians, coloured people, and Africans, receiving less than Third World standards (James & Lever, 2001). Thus, segregated education aimed to preserve white social and political supremacy (Steyn, 2001; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001).

The African National Congress (ANC) came to prominence in the late 1950's as a protest movement, but was banned in 1960 and many of its leaders were jailed. The international community exerted significant economic pressure on South Africa by boycotting South African products and trades and suspending it from participation in the U.N. General Assembly. Internal pressure also contributed to apartheid's eventual collapse.

President de Klerk, who took office from 1989, began a series of reforms of desegregation of public facilities, including hospitals and schools. He also freed anti-apartheid political prisoners, including ANC leader Nelson Mandela. In 1994 Mr Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president by a 63% majority after the country's first "one-man one-vote" election, and the ANC became the ruling party (Mitchell, 1998).

"Not only was apartheid (literally, apart-hood) a moral disaster, but it probably set back the country's economic progress by decades by excluding the bulk of the population from meaningful commerce and wealth-sharing. International economic sanctions, coupled with the short-sightedness of the white minority government, left a social, educational and wealth gap that will

take years, and painful sacrifices by whites, to close. While the apartheid laws have now been taken off the books, the racial attitudes that enforced them still abound..." (Mitchell, 1998, pp. 14)

Due to this legacy of three decades of apartheid, South Africans are deeply aware of their country's racial and ethnic divides (Steyn, 1997). It has been suggested that the cultivation of improved understanding between South Africans in the workplace may be the first step towards nation building (Hall, 1995; Steyn, 1993b).

It is well documented that the business world has an extremely high regard for effective communication skills, as this forms the basic foundation of any successful organisation (see Adey & Andrew, 1990; Botha, 1988; Fielding, 1997; Guffey, 1991). However, Rutter (1996a) believes that "the most overworked word, yet least performed act, in business is 'communication'" (pp. 23). He emphasises the importance of effective business communication by pointing out that anything up to 100% of a normal working day can be spent in face-to-face interaction, either one-to-one, in meetings or interviews and speaking on the telephone. In addition, reading or writing memos, letters, faxes, e-mails and reports usually takes up a substantial part of an employee's day. It has been suggested that communication effectiveness is as important as technical effectiveness when adapting successfully to new cultures or subcultures in the workplace. Thus, a good knowledge of one's field may be insufficient if one lacks the ability to share the knowledge and skills meaningfully (Dean & Popp, 1990; Ruben, 1977).

Although businesses everywhere claims to be colour-blind, in South Africa, the colour of business remains white (Adam, 2000). In 2000, only 7% of the country's top managers were African in a population of 76% Africans" (Adam, 2000, pp. xi). Thus, South African business organisations are currently under pressure to implement affirmative action policies and programmes. Recent literature suggests that valuing cultural diversity in business organisations should no longer be viewed as a threat, but as a compelling business strategy (Lategan, 1999; September, 1994; Wah, 1999). While many organisations have recognised this fact, there are still enormous challenges to be addressed. Workforces in South Africa today typically consist of men and women of different backgrounds, age groups, educational levels and political beliefs representing various cultural groups and 11 different languages (Hall, 1995). However, South African organisations tend to assume that the only way of doing things is the European way and English functions as the *lingua franca* of the majority of South African organisations (Steyn, 1993b). All of these issues create barriers to effective communication in the workplace which subsequently increase the risk of miscommunication. Miscommunication

in the workplace can have a detrimental effect on work performance and productivity which can, in turn, influence the financial well-being of the company (Hall, 1995).

While South Africans may never be competent in all the languages spoken in the country, there needs to be an awareness and understanding of issues related to intercultural communication (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). The subsequent question to this statement is likely to be: What are these issues and more specifically, how do these issues transcend into the South African workplace?

Attention to intercultural communication competence is not only timely but critical in an increasingly international and culturally diverse world (Collier, 1989). Although there is much international research and literature available on intercultural communication in organisations elsewhere (see Bennett, 1993; Collier, 1989; Dean & Popp, 1990; Gudykunst, 1997; Inglis, 1993; Jandt, 1995; Mammam, 1995; McDaniel & Andersen, 1996; Remland, Jones & Brinkman, 1995; Ruben, 1977; Rubin, DeHart & Heintzman, 1991; Shuter, 1994; Wiseman, Hammer & Nishida, 1989), the nature of the South African workforce is different from that in other countries, and research on communication competence conducted elsewhere cannot be assumed to fit the South African context (Steyn, 1997).

There are a number of researchers who have investigated various aspects of intercultural communication in general in South Africa. Chick (1995, 2000), De Kadt (1994, 2000) and Mesthrie (1995) are well-known linguistics in the field of intercultural communication in South Africa. A number of other South African studies have concentrated on linguistic aspects of intercultural communication (see Brewis, 1999; Parry, 1994; Van Jaarsveld, 1998). Others have focused their investigations on the attitudinal and psychological aspects of intercultural communication, particularly in relation to the process of political transformation that South Africa currently finds itself in (see Groenewald, 1996; Ndoleriire, 2000; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995, Steyn, 1993a, 1993b, 1994a, 1994b, 1997, 2001; Steyn & Van Zyl 2001)

However, there is still a severe lack of literature and research available on intercultural communication throughout Africa (Steyn, 1997, 2001). There is a sense of urgency that South Africa should address this immediately as "South Africans now find themselves relating in ways for which the past has prepared them very poorly" (Steyn, 1997. pp. 66). There is a dire need for further South African research to be conducted that can help people understand the sources and consequences of intercultural communication and

suggest how the quality of such communication can be improved (Chick, 1995, Hall, 1995, Steyn, 1994b).

Much research in the fields of commerce and human resources has been conducted that highlights the importance of managing cultural diversity in organisations (Adam, 2000, Adey & Andrew, 1990, Day, 1991; Fielding, 1997; Hall, 1995; Lategan, 1999; Rutter, 1996a, 1996b; Wah, 1999; Wood, 1995). Some researchers have related this specifically to managing cultural diversity that has resulted from employment equity/affirmative action policies (see Human, 1996; Ramphela, 1995; September, 1994; ; Steyn & Motshabi, 1996; Thomas, 1996). However, although much literature exists on intercultural communication and training in business organisations elsewhere (see Dean & Popp, 1990; Mammam, 1995; Ruben, 1977; Rubin, DeHart & Heintzman, 1991), few studies have been undertaken to investigate intercultural communication in South African business organisations.

A study conducted by Hall (1994 cited in Hall, 1995) in a South African business organisation identified cultural differences as a serious obstacle to the development of mutual understanding as well as to ensuring effective communication. It was found that there was a lack of willingness, as well as ability to communicate and interpret information across cultures. Black subjects reported instances of unequal and disrespectful treatment as well as bossy, paternalistic behaviour by white people. White subjects seemed to view differences between themselves and members of other racial groups as an excuse for the lack of communication between white and black employees of the organisation. Hall (1995) suggests that the white employees' lack of knowledge regarding other cultures, as well as the inability of most whites to communicate in a black language, aggravated the situation.

In 1999, the researcher conducted a small exploratory study to investigate the perceptions of a sample of black and white employees regarding intercultural communication in a Cape Town based retail organisation. Black participants' perceptions of the appropriateness of their white colleagues' communication skills were investigated, as well as white participants' perceptions of the appropriateness of their black colleagues' communication skills. It was found that all participants perceived the majority of their colleagues' communication skills to be appropriate across a number of communication settings. The black participants rated their white colleagues' communication least favourably in an informal situation and best on the telephone, while the white participants' perceptions were the exact opposite. The black participants rated their white colleagues'

greetings, rate of speech and speech clarity most favourably, and listening skills, turn-taking, and reaction to communication breakdown least favourably. The white participants rated their black colleagues' greetings, physical contact and grooming most favourably, and reaction to communication breakdown, organisation of content, rate of speech, accent and speech clarity least favourably (Brewis, 1999).

Although the above-mentioned studies are examples of research which have contributed to the knowledge base of intercultural communication in South African organisations, it is well documented that more representative studies in South African business organisations are not only a priority, but a necessity (Hall, 1995, Steyn, 1997).

Furthermore, the importance of studying subjects' perceptions of intercultural communication and perceptual judgments made of self and others during intercultural communication has been highlighted (see Collier, 1989; Wiseman, Hammer & Nishida, 1989). People behave the way they do largely because of the way in which they perceive the world. These behaviours are learned over many years as part of their collective cultural experience (Groenewald, 1996). Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) believe that any organisational or institutional interventions related to cultural diversity and intercultural communication "should be based on sound, situated knowledge of the particular context, and have to be cognisant of the perceptions which operate within the communication field" (pp.1).

Hence the limited number of South African studies and the recommendations provided by international and South African researchers in the field of intercultural communication provided the motivation and framework for this study. The major purpose of this study was to contribute to the knowledge base of perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace.

The main aim of the study was to investigate the perceptions of a sample of black¹ and white employees regarding intercultural communication in a South African business organisation. More specifically, the study aimed to investigate how black employees perceive their white colleagues' communication, and how white employees perceive their

¹ While the researcher is conscious of the socially constructed and contested nature of racial/ethnic categorisations, given South African history, it remains difficult to avoid such problematic labels as "black" and "white". The political label "black" sometimes also refers to the three "non-white" groups in recognition of their common discriminated status, but in this study refers to "Africans", that is, the indigenous majority of the population. The use of such ethnic and racial terms is not meant to uncritically reiterate legal classifications ascribed under apartheid, but is made necessary by the historical legacy of inequality among the racial groups in South Africa.

black colleagues' communication. In addition, the study aimed to investigate how employees perceive their own communication skills as well as to identify the major aspects impacting on intercultural communication effectiveness within their organisation.

As an investigation of perceptions formed the focus of the study, the researcher adopted both an emic and etic approach for the methodology of the study. Although much debate and confusion surrounds the terms 'emics' and 'etics', the distinction between them is important to consider at this point as they represent important guideposts for researchers dealing with cultures other than their own. Since the terms were coined by Kenneth Pike (1967 cited in Berry, 1990), they have spread throughout the social sciences and humanities and in the broadest sense, emics and etics refer to the insider versus the outsider, a subjective versus objective view of the world (Berry, 1990). Both the etic and emic approaches are of value and neither is more important than the other. The value that each approach brings to the research process is complex and is summarised below:

The value of the etic approach:

- ◆ It provides a broad perspective and training about different events around the world, so that similarities and differences can be recognised;
- ◆ Techniques for recording differing phenomena may be acquired;
- ◆ An etic approach is the only point of entry as the only way to begin an analysis is to start with a rough, etic description of it;
- ◆ An etic comparison of selected cultures may allow a researcher to meet practical demands, such as financial limitations or time pressures.

The value of the emic approach:

- ◆ It permits an understanding of the way in which a language or culture is constructed – not as a series of parts, but as a working whole;
- ◆ It helps one to understand individuals in their daily lives, including their attitudes, motives, interests, and personality;
- ◆ It provides "the only basis upon which a predictive science of behaviour can be expected to make some of its greatest progress, since even statistical predictive studies will in many instances prove invalid" (Pike, 1967 cited in Berry, 1990, pp. 86).

One of the most important aspects of combining emic and etic approaches in intercultural research is that it often presents the same data from two points of view (Berry, 1990). In this study, the use of a pre-determined structured questionnaire and in-depth semi-

structured interviews, allowed for these perceptions to be tapped from both an etic and emic approach, respectively.

Due to the scope of the study and the numerous variables involved in intercultural communication investigations, this study focused only on the perceptions of black ("African") and white employees. While South Africa continues to broaden its international relations, literature on the effects that the African worldview has on communication styles and expectations is lacking. "The African people, the major cultural grouping in the southern African region, are diverse and have been affected by their experience of colonialism and apartheid. The need for and benefit of research that is grounded in these realities is self-evident" (Steyn, 1997, pp. 67). It was thus felt that investigating perceptions of black and white South African employees would address this problem and provide interesting data between two groups which have generally come from opposite ends of the South African equality spectrum.

The researcher is aware that the decision to focus on perceptions of black and white employees may prompt further debate regarding the use of the term "interracial" versus "intercultural". James and Lever (2001) suggest that the use of ethnic labels and categories is unavoidable in South Africa "given the fixity that they have come to acquire both in popular consciousness and official business" (pp. 30). Although numerous cultural issues do not fall along racial lines in South Africa, it is a stark reality that these terms are extremely interconnected in South African society, predominantly because of a history of three centuries of European domination and the "classificatory mania of the apartheid regime" (James & Lever, 2001, pp. 31). In fact, with the current drive "to address and eliminate racial inequality, it seems likely that such racial naming will remain prominent in a society constitutionally committed to nonracialism" (James & Lever, 2001, pp. 33).

As in Parry's (1994) and Hall's (1995) research, this study only investigated perceptions of male employees as attitudes and behaviours vary between men and women, even within the same culture, and can result in misinterpretation which can lead to stereotype and prejudice (Mammam, 1995). These problems arise in verbal and nonverbal communication (Henley and Kramarae, 1991; Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995). Hence due to the scope of the study, the perceptions of males only were considered.

Due to the influence of the organisational culture on intercultural communication effectiveness in a multicultural workplace (see Mammam, 1995), the study was limited to one organisation.

It is hoped that numerous theoretical, practical and future research implications will emerge from this study.

The researcher firmly believes that due to extensive intercultural interaction in the “New” South Africa, the theoretical information which emerges from this study will provide a valuable contribution to the knowledge base of perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace. It is hoped that with increased knowledge, greater understanding between cultures and ultimately improved intercultural communication in South Africa, will be fostered.

It is acknowledged that feedback is an essential component of the research process and it is anticipated that the organisation involved in the study will experience practical benefits from this study once feedback has been provided to key role players. In addition, it is hoped that the findings will assist in informing future training and support programmes in other business organisations in South Africa.

In Chapter 2, terms, terminology, theoretical concepts and research studies that are central to the field of intercultural communication are presented and discussed.

In Chapter 3, the aims, research design, data collection process, as well as methods of data analysis are described. In addition, participant selection criteria will be explained and a thorough description of participants involved in the study are provided.

In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are presented.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of these findings in relation to past studies and current literature is undertaken.

Finally, the conclusions of this study are provided in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Humankind is now living in the “Information Age”, where people’s lives and jobs revolve around the development, management, manipulation, processing and exchange of information (Guffey, 1991). All of these processes require communication, preferably effective communication. It has been suggested that the most difficult form of communication is intercultural communication (see Fielding, 1997; Jandt, 1995; Ruben, 1997; Rutter, 1996a, 1996b). This chapter includes a background of terminology and issues relevant to the field of intercultural communication.

2.1. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A DISSECTION OF THE TERM

As one delves into the field of intercultural communication, it is essential that one understands exactly what this term refers to. In attempting to understand it, one needs to define its two major semantic roots - **culture** and **communication** – as well as to identify what is meant by **intercultural** communication, as opposed to **intracultural** and **cross-cultural** communication.

2.1.1. ‘Culture’

While multiple definitions of **culture** prevail, to date no consensus on one definition has been reached (Human, 1996). This is probably due to the fact that the notion of culture may be considered from an historical, sociological, psychological and normative perspective (Parry, 1994). While the historical perspective suggests that culture is a product of human activities, traditions and social learning, the sociological perspective emphasises cultural patterns and organisations. The psychological perspective focuses on, among other things, learning, development and habits and the normative perspective emphasises values, norms and human behaviour.

Fielding (1997) chooses to define culture as “systems of beliefs, assumptions and values that people share” (pp. 442), while Wardaugh (1986 cited in Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995) expands on this by stating that culture is “the particular knowledge and beliefs that members of a community have which enable them to operate in a manner acceptable to the group, and in any role that the group finds acceptable” (pp. 15). People tend to experience strong emotions around cultural issues and do not give up the deep values of

their cultures easily. Instead, those values are usually reinterpreted in light of present circumstances (Steyn, 1994).

In a discussion of intercultural communication in business organisations, it is important to understand the application of the term 'culture' to organisations. **Organisational culture** consists of components such as language, beliefs, values, rituals, stories, ideology and behaviour which are appropriate and acceptable to an organisation and which are shared by all its members (Hall, 1995). Similarly, Fielding (1997) defines it as "the sharing of a set of ideas, values and attitudes" (pp. 442) by members of an organisation. These values and attitudes play a crucial part in holding the organisation together, but they develop slowly over time and employees usually understand the cultural values of their organisation only once they have worked there for some time. The daily atmosphere in an organisation may be referred to as the **organisational climate** and is determined, to a large extent, by communication between employees and people's perceptions of these interactions (Fielding, 1997).

Organisations are continually evolving, changing and unstable, consisting of the communicative relationships between organisation members. They usually contain many, often competing **subcultures** which have distinctive patterns of shared ideologies and distinct sets of cultural forms, yet they differ noticeably from the core culture in which they are embedded. The emergence of subcultures within an organisation is natural in the development of work groups and are likely to form within informal and formal groups within an organization (e.g. departments and management bureaucracies). Groups defined by demographic characteristics (e.g. age, sex, culture) have a high potential for becoming significant subcultures (Pepper, 1995; Trice, 1993).

2.1.2. 'Communication'

The notion of **communication** is another extremely complex phenomenon (Smith & Leinonen, 1992). One needs to be able to share meanings with others through communication in order to function as part of a society (Fielding, 1997). As a result, communication does not merely refer to 'the transfer of information', but rather, as Rutter (1996a; 1996b) suggests, involves the creation of understanding between people. Smith and Leinonen (1992) suggest that:

"Communication is about being able to co-ordinate and combine different ways of conveying meanings, via speech, writing, signing, gestures, etcetera, and not merely about being able to

produce well-structured grammatical utterances with clear pronunciation and unambiguous meaning.” (pp. 14)

Verbal expressions of meaning (or speech acts) consist of signalling systems which have structures and patterns that are generated by rules (Smith & Leinonen, 1992). **Language** expressions do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of an entire communicative event.

According to Steyn and Van Zyl (2002), language is an important social organiser and cultural signifier, which positions speakers and listeners in certain relations of power and which can be a very insidious tool of intimidation to mark those who fall outside the norm.

Although the very core of verbal communication involves the ability to produce and comprehend language, such language abilities are only part of communicative ability (Smith & Leinonen, 1992).

Numerous changes have taken place over the last three decades in the study of language and communication. These changes have involved a shift of interest from linguistic structure towards the co-operative creation of meaning in context. The fields of **discourse analysis and pragmatics** describe a wide range of phenomena and consider what communication entails beyond description of language abilities, but do not neglect the centrality of language in communication with oneself and others. Pragmatic considerations involve matching linguistic expressions with contextual considerations and the skills and abilities, the motivations and influences, which shape the communicative event both from the speakers' and the listeners' perspectives, are considered (Smith & Leinonen, 1992). The study of pragmatics addresses the issues of, among others, *intentionality* underlying meaning expressions; *conversational principles or implicatures* (particularly their role in governing co-operation in communication and negotiation of meanings between participants); *presupposition*; *how communication is 'managed'* (involves examination of who controls the flow of communication and of the extent of shared responsibility); the *appropriateness* of meaning expressions (in which contexts and why people find communicative behaviours appropriate or inappropriate); the *choices* that speakers and listeners have and the *constraints* which are placed upon meaning expression and interpretation in social interaction (Smith & Leinonen, 1992).

Nonverbal communication is a component of the communication process which should not be overlooked. Singelis (1994) reports that up to 93% of the social meaning of a message is carried via nonverbal channels. Nonverbal communication is multi-channelled, that is, it can come from visual, auditory, olfactory, or tactile channels. It is

conveyed through presentational codes, which are transmitted by the human body and are only able to give messages about the here and now (Fiske, 1990). Presentational codes are limited to face-to-face communication or communication when the communicator is present. Complex and subtle meanings are conveyed through non-verbal communication, to supplement and even replace verbal expressions of meaning. A listener's non-verbal communication can provide immediate feedback to a speaker and is extremely efficient in conveying emotive and connotative aspects in communication (Fiske, 1990). In intercultural interactions, nonverbal communication may become even more important because of difficulties with language and reliance on nonverbal communication may consequently be even greater than normal.

Categories of non-verbal communication include the following: *vocal aspects* (prosodic codes and paralinguistic codes); *haptics* (the use of touch); *proxemics* (body space) and *kinesics* (body posture, facial expression, gestures, and eye gaze) (Fiske, 1990; Parry, 1994; Penn, 1998; Smith & Leinonen, 1992).

2.1.3. 'Intercultural' Communication

Although the syntactical difference between the terms *intercultural*, *intracultural* and *cross-cultural* communication lies in their relevant prefixes, the semantic differences between these terms are vast. While *cross-cultural* studies explore "particular features of communication (e.g. compliments, refusals, apologies, turn-taking) across two or more cultures", *intercultural* communication studies look at "particular contexts of intercultural encounters and attend to whatever communication features are salient in that encounter" (Carbaugh, 1992 cited in Chick, 1995, pp. 232). *Intracultural* communication, in turn, refers to communication patterns endemic to a particular country or co-culture within a society (Shuter, 1994). Intracultural communication is generally less threatening than intercultural communication, as similarities are immediately obvious and more can be taken for granted (Steyn, 1994b).

Although intercultural communication is often difficult and complex, it is wrong to associate it with inevitable communication breakdown (Chick, 1995; Coupland, Wiemann & Giles, 1991). Steyn (1993a; 1993b) suggests that a person's ability to communicate effectively in intercultural interactions depends largely on their intracultural communication. People participating in intercultural exchanges need to work harder, and with more consciousness at these interactions than when participating in intracultural

exchanges, as the barriers which interfere with the achievement of mutual understanding are greater and more difficult to overcome.

2.2. KEY CONCEPTS/ISSUES SURROUNDING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

There are a number of concepts and issues that are central to the field of intercultural communication and should be explored in any study which investigates any aspect of intercultural communication. A number of these will now be discussed.

2.2.1. The Whorfian Hypothesis

Culture and communication are very closely related, as culture affects both verbal and nonverbal messages (Gudykunst, 1997; Guffey, 1991; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). In fact, it has been suggested that culture cannot exist in a vacuum and has no life apart from language (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995).

Named after the American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, the **Whorfian hypothesis** or the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** acknowledges this close relationship between language and culture and goes so far as to suggest that a person's world view is conditioned largely by their native language(s). However, the influence is also to some extent reciprocal, as one's physical and social environment, as well as the values of a society, can also affect language (Kashula, 1995; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). Although certain aspects of the Whorfian hypothesis have been accepted, strict interpretations of it are generally criticised as everyday experience contradicts these kinds of assumptions.

2.2.2. Worldviews

According to Steyn (1997), **worldview** lies at the heart of culture, but it is a concept that is difficult to define. It is suggested that the three major groupings of worldview are **European, Asian and African** (Asante & Vora, 1983 cited in Steyn, 1997). The different groups in South Africa represent all three worldviews (Van Jaarsveld, 1998). Parry (1994) suggests that it is important to consider worldviews when discussing intercultural interaction in South Africa.

Although much international research has explored European and Asian worldviews, little work has been done to investigate how African or Afrocentric worldview impacts on the communication style of Africans. Steyn (1997) summarises the literature available on African worldview and reports that the suggestions that have been made refer to the African worldview as essentially religious, where “personhood is achieved through participation in the community”, there is a close link with nature and “a concept of time is focused on the past and present rather than the future” (pp. 70). Parry (1994) refers to the African worldview as generally intuitive, collective, based on experience and more traditional.

In contrast to this, the Western or European worldview is suggested to be insensitive, egocentric, materialistic, rational, analytical, detached and goal-orientated in nature (Parry, 1994; Ruben, 1977. Steyn, 1997). Steyn (1997) warns that it should not be assumed that research on intercultural communication in Europe will be applicable to white population groups of European descent in South Africa, as they do not necessarily share all the cultural assumptions of their European ancestors.

2.2.3. Interpretative Frames

Interpretative frames is a term used by Chick (1995) which refers to structures of expectation which are formed by the knowledge that people gain from their experience of a culture or cultures. Interpretative frames are used to make sense of new experiences and enable interlocutors to identify **contextualisation cues**, a term used extensively by interactional sociolinguists. Contextualisation cues in turn convey contextual information which enables the interlocutors to:

- ♦ signal what ‘speech activity’ they consider themselves to be engaged in;
- ♦ establish what their social relationships are in that activity;
- ♦ predict what will come next;
- ♦ fill in information not explicitly conveyed in the message
- ♦ infer the illocutionary forces of what is uttered; and
- ♦ establish the relationship between what is being uttered and the developing argument or theme (Chick 1995, 2000).

Due to the fact that interpretative frames are a product of past experience, it follows that different interlocutors bring different interpretative frames to interactions. Often a great deal of negotiation is required in order to bring interpretative frames into alignment so that interlocutors feel that they have reached an understanding of what they are doing together

and of their relationship to one another. In applying this concept to the field of intercultural communication, it becomes clear that considerable negotiation is usually required in intercultural encounters, as the life experiences of people from different cultural groups are often very different. Interactional sociolinguists have shown that very often interpretative frames and contextualisation cues of interlocutors from different cultures are mismatched. As a result, intercultural encounters are frequently asynchronous (that is, the interlocutors misinterpret one another) and subsequently, the risk of miscommunication is high. Chick (1995, 2000) believes that repeated miscommunication during intercultural exchanges can serve to generate and reinforce negative cultural stereotypes.

2.2.4. Acculturation and Culture Shock

The ability to adapt to another culture is known as **acculturation** and may occur in a wide range of sociocultural contexts and among a variety of groups (Fielding, 1997; Ward, 1996). Ruben (1977) suggests that the ability to react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort is an important skill involved in acculturation. Excessive discomfort can lead to confusion, frustration, or even hostility, which may be dysfunctional to the development of effective interpersonal relationships within and across cultures.

Due to the high number of uncertainties involved in intercultural encounters, high anxiety or tension (also known as stress) is common. Also known as **cultural fatigue**, **culture shock** refers to sustained anxiety or tension caused by the unpredictability, helplessness, threats to self-esteem and general feeling of being “on guard” that a person in a foreign culture may experience over time. Reserve energy supplies may become depleted, physical capacity may be weakened and a feeling of exhaustion, desperation or depression may take over. People who experience culture shock and do not resort to the use of psychological defenses, like many do, may find that his/her body absorbs the stress which in turn presents itself in the form of physical pains or stress-related illnesses. Barna (1994) compares culture shock to a disease – “it has different effects, different degrees of severity and different time spans for different people” (p. 344).

2.3. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Effective acculturation depends heavily on intercultural communication competence, which is a multidimensional construct and may be defined as “the ability to effectively relate to other persons” (Ruben, 1977, pp. 472). Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995) define

it as “the ability not only to use grammatical sentences in a language but also to use these in the appropriate context, at the right time and place...it involves both grammatical as well as cultural competence” (pp. 13). This construct has been explored under the labels of cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural effectiveness, multiculturalism, intercultural effectiveness, cultural competence, intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence (Taylor, 1994 cited in Steyn, 1997).

According to Wiseman, Hammer and Nishida (1989), intercultural communication competence includes culture-specific understanding, culture-general understanding, and a positive regard for people of other cultures. Researchers in the field of intercultural communication stress the importance of conveying trust, empathy, sincerity and respect through one's communication. A person is more likely to respond positively to a speaker who conveys that he or she is sincerely interested in what the other person is saying. This can help to establish a strong foundation for an effective relationship that would facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge.

Ruben (1977) identifies seven dimensions of importance to intercultural communication competence (listed in descending order of importance):

- ◆ the capacity to be flexible;
- ◆ the capacity to be non-judgemental;
- ◆ tolerance for ambiguity;
- ◆ the capacity to communicate respect;
- ◆ the capacity to personalize one's knowledge and perceptions;
- ◆ the capacity to display empathy; and
- ◆ the capacity for turn-taking.

2.4. BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

There are a number of barriers to achieving communicative competence during intercultural encounters. In Ndoleriire (2000)'s discussion of a very simplistic communication model, the notion of communication barriers is referred to as “*noise*” (see Figure 1).

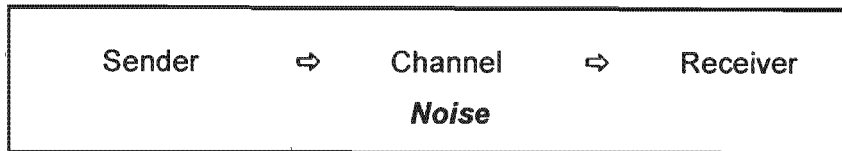


FIGURE 1: Basic Model of the Communication Process (Ndoleriire, 2000, pp. 269)

This noise factor refers to the various obstacles that hamper efficient communication between the **sender** and **receiver** of a message via a particular **channel** (can be verbal or non-verbal, oral or written). Ndoleriire (2000) and Fielding (1997) suggest the following as types of noise that can interfere during communication:

- physical noise (e.g. other people talking at the same time)
- events in the environment (e.g. mosquito biting the speaker)
- sender variables (e.g. poor articulation, inadequate co-ordination and ordering of ideas, unintended ambiguity, false or distorted information)
- receiver variables (e.g. not attentive enough, not psychologically ready to receive the message, over-interpretations of what the speaker is saying)
- cultural beliefs and practices
- attitude of sender and/or receiver
- socio-cultural practices and biases

In Fielding's (1997) model of business communication (Figure 2) the resultant communication that takes place between a sender and receiver in the workplace is represented by two overlapping circles. They do not overlap completely, as very seldom is the message sent exactly the same as the message received. This is due to a number of factors, including the physical and psychological factors or "noise". In addition, he emphasises that employees' individual **cultural and work backgrounds, perceptions** (of the world, the workplace and specific tasks), **needs and goals** and **pressures** play a significant role in achieving mutual understanding.

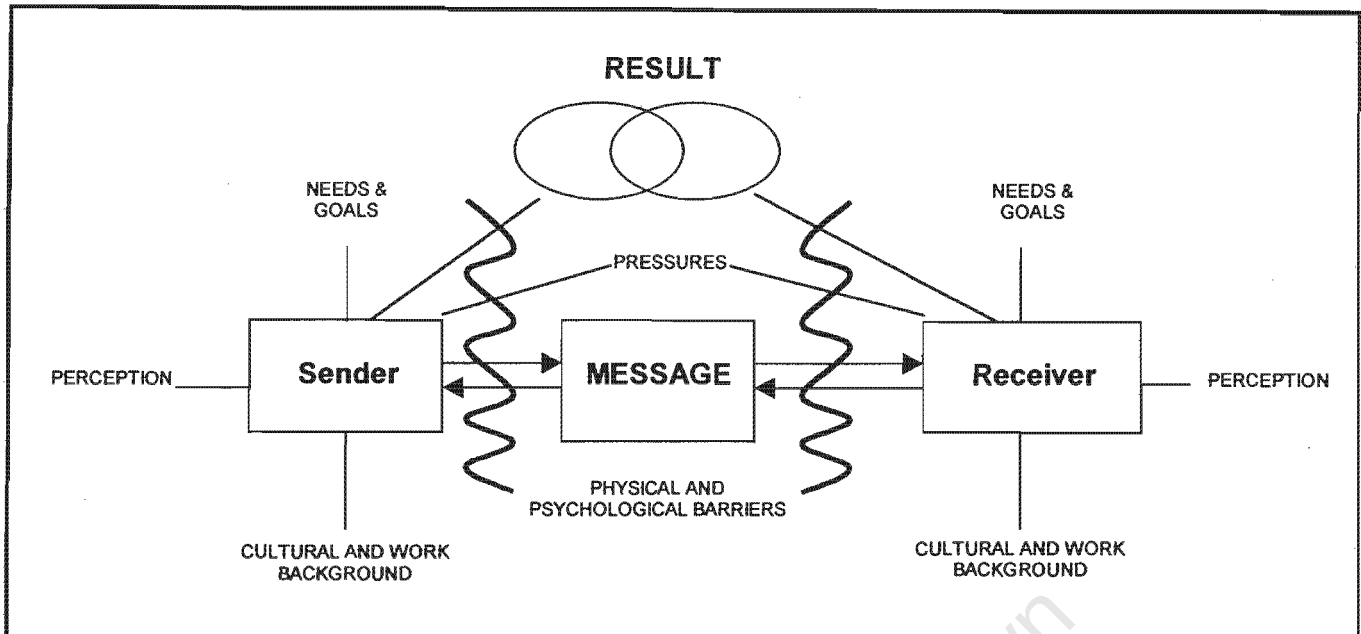


FIGURE 2: Adapted Version of Fielding's (1997) Model of Communication

Steyn (1993) strongly believes that the major barriers in intercultural communication are attitudinal and that "effective intercultural communication takes place when *relationship* is valued above *task*" (pp. 13). Barna (1994) states that new proximity and new types of relationships are presenting communication challenges that few people are ready to meet and identifies six stumbling blocks in intercultural communication. These stumbling blocks will be discussed below in combination with other literature related to barriers of intercultural communication.

Assumptions of similarity are particularly evident when people decode the nonverbal symbols, signs and signals of someone from a different culture (Barna, 1994). A number of real-life examples are provided to illustrate people's tendency to naively assume there are sufficient similarities among people of the world to make communication easy (see Barna, 1994).

Language differences can exacerbate tension between individuals in the same language community, or in different language communities within a single country (Bickley, 1982). People tend to interpret speech through the 'filter' of their native language or culture, and attach different meaning to different communication codes (Fielding, 1997; Gass & Varonis, 1991). People who come from different cultural backgrounds are less able to predict the results of their communication and find it more difficult to predict the other person's responses. In addition, they may feel that they do not share each other's

values and this perception may place additional strain on their communication (Fielding, 1997).

As discussed above, **nonverbal communication** conveys complex and subtle meanings, to supplement and even replace verbal expressions of meaning. Specific aspects of non-verbal communication are reported to show great intercultural variation that can easily result in miscommunication (see Adey & Andrew, 1990; Argyle, 1982; Fielding, 1997; Rutter, 1996a; Van Jaarsveld, 1998).

High anxiety or tension is common in intercultural interactions due to the presence of a high number of uncertainties – “outcomes of interactions seem unsure and responses of other interactants somewhat unpredictable” (Steyn, 1994, pp. 15).

Barna (1994) considers anxiety to be a serious stumbling block, often underlying and compounding the other stumbling blocks and often the distraction of trying to reduce the feeling of anxiety makes mistakes even more likely - “too much anxiety or tension requires some form of relief which too often comes in the form of defenses, such as the skewing of perceptions, withdrawal, or hostility” (pp. 342).

Preconceptions and stereotypes as well as the tendency to evaluate are grouped by Gudykunst (1998) and Wiseman, Hammer & Nishida (1989) under the concept of **attitude**. Various aspects of intercultural attitude overlap and interact to significantly influence intercultural communication competence. The major aspects that affect intercultural communication include stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism (Barna, 1994; Gudykunst, 1998)

◆ **Stereotypes**

Cultural stereotyping refers to the preconceived ideas that are incorporated into a specific culture or ethnic group (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Fielding, 1997). Gudykunst (1998) states that stereotyping is a natural result of the communication process and refers to “the pictures we have in our heads for the people we place in the various social categories we use” (pp. 122). Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) state that stereotypes are “evaluative and operate at a high level of generalisation” and have the effect of “presenting foreclosed meanings of social groupings, usually based on superficiality and ignorance” (pp. 33). In other words, individual differences are not considered and members of the culture behave as though their stereotyping is true, even in the absence of evidence (Fielding, 1997;

Parry, 1994). Those who believe in absolute stereotypes are likely to experience extreme difficulty in developing meaningful intercultural relationships (Parry, 1994).

◆ **Ethnocentrism**

The notion of **ethnocentrism** refers to the phenomenon where people of one culture measure all other cultures in relation to their own and unconsciously believe in the superiority of their own culture, even in the absence of evidence or proof, that is, the belief that one's culture is 'the centre of the world' (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Fielding, 1997; Mammam, 1995; Steyn, 1993b). Many problems encountered during intercultural communication are due to subconscious ethnocentrism.

Barna's (1994) suggests that the tendency to evaluate is related to the notion of ethnocentrism and is defined as the tendency "to approve or disapprove the statements and actions of the other person or group rather than to try to comprehend completely the thoughts and feelings expressed from the world view of the other" (pp. 341). Barna (1994) believes that it takes both the awareness of the tendency to close our minds and the courage to risk changing our own perceptions and values to dare to comprehend why someone thinks and acts differently from us.

◆ **Prejudice**

While stereotypes can be positive or negative, prejudice refers to "the irrational dislike, suspicion, or hatred of a particular group, race, religion, or sexual orientation" (Rothenberg, 1992 cited in Jandt, 1995, pp. 233). Persons within the group are viewed not in terms of their individual merit but according to the superficial characteristics that make them part of the group.

Variations in languages can lead to **linguistic prejudice**, which is "a judgmental, denigrating attitude towards the language or language variety spoken by others" (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995, pp. 28). People tend to ascribe psychological characteristics to individuals who use these variations and people may be regarded as intelligent, friendly or rude because of their accent, expressions, use of vocabulary, etc. It is well-documented that such value judgements can be unreliable and usually result in tension and anxiety (Fielding, 1997; Steyn, 1993). Linguistic prejudice is not necessarily ethnically based, but is determined socially, contextually or environmentally. It does not only occur across languages and cultures, but also within the same language group

(Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). Inglis (1993) reports that a dominant group may expect to hear standard 'appropriate' language, and when faced with linguistic variability in an intercultural encounter, may react negatively. If individuals judge the speech behaviour of others according to their own standards, misunderstandings are likely to occur (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995).

As a result, participants in intercultural exchanges often need to give up strongly held ideas and change attitudes in order to understand other people's ways of thinking. Subsequently high levels of cultural defensiveness and anxiety often accompany intercultural communication and unfortunately this can significantly influence the ability of the participant to engage in meaningful communication (Steyn, 1994b).

In this chapter, the term 'intercultural communication' was dissected, its separate components were defined and discussed and the application of the term 'culture' to organisations was explored. A number of concepts which are central to the field of intercultural communication were presented, including the Whorfian Hypothesis, worldviews, intercultural communication effectiveness, acculturation and culture shock, and were applied to organisations. The researcher then looked at the barriers to achieving intercultural communication effectiveness, which included an indepth discussion of attitude as a barrier.

In the next chapter the researcher will detail the methods used to illicit perceptions of a intercultural communication in a South African organisation. In addition, the reader will be introduced to the study's sample of participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the aims, research design, participant selection criteria and description of participants used in this study. In addition, methods of data collection, development of materials and data analysis are described.

3.1. AIMS

The primary aim of this study was to identify and document the perceptions of a sample of black and white South African male managers regarding intercultural communication in a South African business organisation.

More specifically:

- ◆ To determine how a sample of middle managerial level black male employees in a South African organisation perceive their white male colleagues' communication skills in the workplace.
- ◆ To determine how a sample of middle managerial level white male employees in a South African organisation perceive their black male colleagues' communication skills in the workplace.
- ◆ To determine how a sample of middle managerial level black and white male employees in a South African organisation perceive their own communication skills in the workplace.
- ◆ To investigate the need for, availability of and involvement in training surrounding cultural diversity and intercultural communication within this organisation.
- ◆ To identify the major aspects impacting on intercultural communication effectiveness between black and white middle managerial level employees within this organisation.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

An interpretative, descriptive, qualitative design was employed in this study. Steyn (1997) suggests that the most appropriate methodology for research on intercultural communication in Africa would be interpretive – “the study design should be such that it shows maximum respect for the meanings the participants themselves attach to communication behaviours” (pp. 70). It is further suggested that the study design should

be culturally sensitive to the manner of data collecting that is most comfortable for the participants, and therefore also most likely to get close to their real interpretations (Steyn, 1997).

Qualitative methods enabled the researcher to study selected issues in detail. Qualitative research is effective when used to get an in-depth sense of what people think of a particular event, as there is space within this type of research structure to explore new information (Katzenellenbogen, Joubert & Yach, 1991). Thus, the methods used to obtain the necessary information enabled the researcher to gain access to the participants' views and experiences, expressed in their own words (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990). These methods were also useful for producing new ideas in areas which are new to research (Katzenellenbogen et al., 1991).

Furthermore, qualitative research can be particularly effective when used simultaneously with other types of research to get additional perspectives on the problem (Katzenellenbogen et al., 1991). In using differing research methods as a means of addressing similar issues, findings are further confirmed and the information obtained is expanded (Krueger, 1994). Consequently the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews with the participants has been used in conjunction with the results obtained from the self-administered questionnaires. The triangulation of data by multiple methods was considered to be essential to answer many of the most important questions in organisational research, where there are a combination of very complex processes involving a number of factors over time (Cassell & Symon, 1997).

3.3. BUSINESS ORGANISATION AND PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1. Business Organisation

The participants for this study were recruited from an international financial services organisation, which has its South African headoffice in Cape Town. The choice of organisation was based on the fact that this organisation has an extremely large employee database and has publically made a commitment to employment equity and employee development.

3.3.2. Participants

3.3.2.1. Sample Size

Fifty-two participants, 26 white and 26 black ("African"), completed rating scales for Part One of this study. **Sixteen of these participants** then participated in semi-structured interviews for Part Two of the study. No participants withdrew from the study.

3.3.2.2. Selection Criteria

All participants were required to meet the following criteria:

(a) Nationality: All participants were required to be South African

One's country of origin plays an important role in intercultural effectiveness, as intercultural experiences can vary with country of origin. The meaning attached to country of origin partly influences attitudes and behaviour or parties to intercultural interaction (Mammam, 1995). The researcher was only interested in South African perceptions related to intercultural communication.

(b) Race: Participants were required to be from the black or white racial groups

The decision to include only black and white employees in this study was based on a number of reasons, which have been partly discussed in Chapter 1:

- ◆ To focus the study and keep independent variables to a minimum
- ◆ To enable comparisons with previous research studies focusing on black and white perceptions (see Day, 1991; Hall, 1995; Human, 1996; Parry, 1994; Van Jaarsveld, 1998)
- ◆ To address the need for research regarding the effects that the African worldview has on communication styles and expectations.
- ◆ To provide interesting data between two groups which have generally come from opposite ends of the South African equality spectrum.

At this point it is important to note that the researcher is aware that there is an understandable resistance in South Africa to discourse which treats people in terms of 'group' affiliation, especially ethnic or cultural groups and that there is a fear that any attention paid to cultural and ethnic differences will entrench feelings of difference and

encourage further racial stereotyping (Steyn, 1997). However, it is important that “research be conducted from the standpoint of those whose voices have previously not been heard” (Gonzalez, Houston & Chen, 1994 cited in Steyn, 1997, pp. 67). Steyn (1997) therefore warns that care and sensitivity in study design and procedure are prerequisites for the successful implementation of studies that involve separating participants along racial lines. The researcher took cognisance of this suggestion by assuring participants of complete confidentiality throughout the study, as well as considering participants’ sensitivity to racial issues in the development of materials. In addition, the organisation was provided with extensive feedback from the study to assist with future development and training of employees.

(c) Gender: *Participants were required to be male*

The decision to include only males in this study was based on the wealth of literature on the relationship between gender and communication and the differences that exist in the communication styles of males and females (see Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995; Henley & Kramarae, 1991; Smith & Leinonen, 1992). Thus, this decisions was made in an attempt to focus the study.

(d) Age: *Participants were required to be between 21 and 39 years of age*

It has been observed that age is an important factor in subsequent adaptation to a foreign setting. The older one becomes the more difficult it is to adapt to a new cultural system (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984; Guthrie, 1975; Kim, 1977, all cited in Mammam, 1995). Thus, younger people are more flexible in adapting to a new environment. Also, in many cultures there is a strong relationship between age and status in society. In many African cultures, respect for people increases with age and this in turn affects communication styles and choices (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995; Van Jaarsveld, 1998).

In order to focus the study and ensure that the age group of the sample encompassed numerous employees employed at a middle managerial level, the age of the participants was restricted to the range of 21 to 39 years.

(e) Language: *All participants were required to be fluent in English*

In order to limit the variables impacting on the study and due to the fact that English is the stipulated *lingua franca* at this organisation, all participants were required to be fluent in English. However, participants did not have to be first language English speakers.

There was no need for the researcher to assess participants' fluency before commencing the data collection as this is a criterion for employment at this organisation.

(f) Organisational Level: *All participants were required to be employed by the same organisation, on a middle managerial level, as defined by the organisation.*

In addition to numerous other influences, it is well documented that differences in status and seniority often cause misunderstanding during intercultural interaction (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995; Van Jaarsveld, 1998). In an attempt to keep the sample as homogenous as possible, only one stratum of management was included.

(g) Length of Employment: *Minimum 6 months*

Mammam (1995) suggests that one's experience dimension affects intercultural effectiveness in a multicultural workplace. All employees, regardless of culture, age, etc. require a certain period of time to adapt to a new organisation. The researcher therefore specified that participants should have been employed at the organisation for at least 6 months.

3.3.2.3. Participant Description

Table 1: Description of Participants

		Black participants (n = 26)	White participants (n = 26)
First Language	English	2	24
	Afrikaans	0	2
	Xhosa	12	0
	Other	12	0
Second Language	English	23	2
	Afrikaans	0	23
	Other	3	0
	No second language	0	1
Third Language	(Various)	21	3
Fourth Language	(Various)	9	0
Fifth Language	(Various)	5	0
Sixth Language	(Various)	2	0
Seventh Language	(Various)	3	0
Age	Mean	29.7 years	30.4 years
	Range	23 – 37 years	24 – 38 years
Highest Qualification	University degree	19 (73%)	18 (69%)
	Diploma/Certificate	7 (27%)	4 (15%)
	Matric	0 (0%)	4 (15%)
Length of Employment	Mean	3 years, 5 months	6 years, 3 months
	Range	7 months – 12 years	11 months – 14 years
Previous Work Experience	No previous jobs	5 (19%)	12 (46%)
	1 previous job	13 (50%)	8 (31%)
	More than 1 previous job	8 (31%)	6 (23%)

As can be seen from Table 1 and Figure 3, 24 of the 26 white participants' speak English as their first language and Afrikaans as their second language. The majority of the black participants speak an African language as their first language and English as their second language.

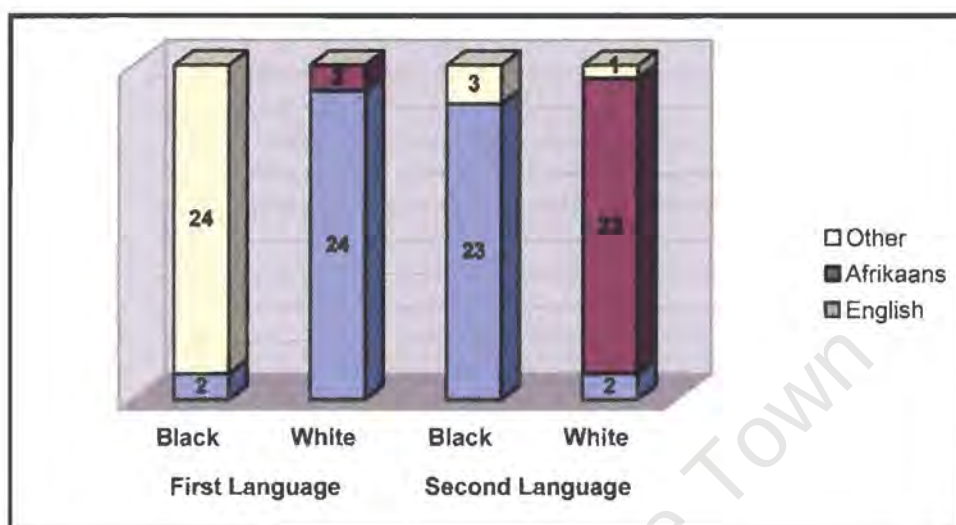


Figure 3: First and Second Languages of Participants

As can be seen in Figure 4, a further distinction between black and white participants related to the degree of multilingualism. While the majority of white participants are only able to speak two languages, the majority of black participants are able to speak three or more languages. In fact, three of the black participants were able to speak at least seven languages.

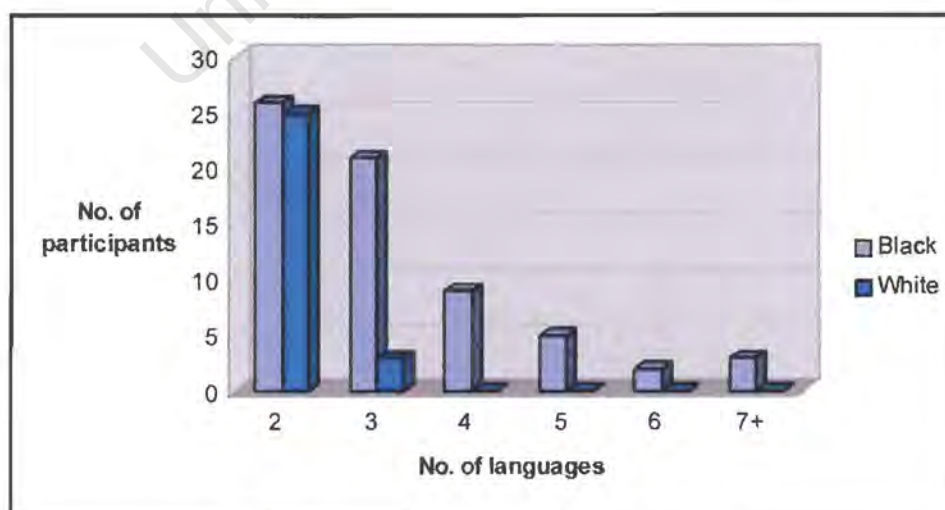


Figure 4: Multilingualism of Participants

As can be seen from Table 1, the average age of black participants was 29.7 years, with a range of 23 to 37 years. The average age of the white participants was 30.4 years, with a range of 24 to 38 years. In addition, this table reveals that the majority of all participants had obtained a university degree. All black participants possessed a university degree or a diploma/certificate, while 15% of the white participants indicated that their highest educational qualification was Matric (Grade 12).

In terms of length of employment, the average for the white participants (6 years, 3 months) was much higher than the average for the black participants (3 years, 5 months). However, the range in this category was quite similar: 7 months to 12 years for black participants and 11 months to 14 years for white participants.

Table 1 also reveals that the majority of white participants (46%) had not had any work experience outside this organisation. While this was true for 19% of the black participants, 50% of this group had had one previous job.

3.4. INFORMED CONSENT

Permission to conduct the study within the organisation was obtained from the organisation's Human Resource Group. The purpose of the study as well as the procedures to be undertaken were fully explained to all participants involved in this research (see Appendix 1). Agreement of the participants to take part in this research study was obtained via verbal and written consent (see Appendix 2). Anonymity of the informants was guaranteed throughout the research project.

3.5. PILOT STUDY

The methodology of this study was based largely upon the methodology of a study previously conducted by the researcher on perceptions of intercultural communication in another South African business organisation (Brewis, 1999). The limitations of this previous study were taken into careful consideration when creating the framework for the methodology of the current study.

Katzenellenbogen et al. (1999) suggest that small pilot studies are necessary when developing a questionnaire in order to refine the instrument. Thus, before data collection commenced, the researcher conducted a small pilot study with black and white

participants not employed in the organisation used in this study. The aims of this pilot study were as follows:

- ◆ To estimate the time required to complete the rating scales
- ◆ To estimate the time required for each semi-structured interview
- ◆ To measure the effectiveness and appropriateness of the rating scale and interview questions
- ◆ To identify any technical difficulties that might arise from audio recording, seating arrangements, etc.

Based on the pilot study, the following was determined:

- ◆ Twenty to 35 minutes should be allowed for the researcher's explanation and the participant's completion of the rating scales and 30 to 45 minutes should be allowed for the completion of the semi-structured interviews.
- ◆ It is necessary for the researcher to explain the rating scale to the participant to ensure that definitions were read and understood before the rating scale was completed.
- ◆ The participant should then complete the questionnaire with the researcher present to ensure that problems and uncertainties could be clarified immediately.
- ◆ The analysis would need to be data driven in order for all relevant data to be included in the analysis.

Data from the pilot study was not included in the research project.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION

The data collected in this research project consisted of four main components:

- ◆ Preliminary Study: Consultation with key role players in organisation
- ◆ Part One: Completion of self-administered questionnaires
- ◆ Part Two: Conducting and recording of individual semi-structured interviews
- ◆ Feedback: Feedback to key role players in organisation

3.6.1. Preliminary Study

It is well documented in the literature that workplaces are cultures and that when investigating intercultural communication in a multicultural workplace, organisational factors need to be considered when interpreting the findings (see Mammam, 1995; Trice, 1993). It has been suggested that intercultural communication cannot be examined in isolation, but needs to be contextualised within the organisation and society in which it takes place. The context, in which an experience is lived, is believed to be imperative with regards to fully understanding the human experience or human communication (Katzenellenbogen, 1999).

The researcher therefore conducted interviews with a number of key role players across a range of managerial levels and divisions within the organisation in order to obtain further information about the organisation's history, culture and current campaigns/programmes related to cultural diversity and intercultural communication.

Table 2 below provides an outline of the participants in this preliminary study, including their designations.

Table 2: Participants in Preliminary Study

MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT	Executive General Manager
HUMAN RESOURCES	Executive General Manager
	Group Consultant and Project Manager
EMPLOYMENT EQUITY DEPARTMENT	Department Manager
BUSINESS SCHOOL	Performance Consultant

Interviews with these participants were conducted. While particular open-ended questions were employed in the interviews in order to elicit information pertinent to each participants' experience and role in the organisation, participants were given the opportunity to raise issues that they felt the researcher should be aware of.

The Executive General Manager of Marketing and Management was interviewed to obtain context regarding the organisation's core culture and sub-cultures. In addition, information related to the history of the company as well as internal and external factors impacting on the organisation in the past and the present was requested. Furthermore,

the researcher requested information regarding the organisation's current campaigns and projects related to cultural diversity, employment equity and intercultural communication.

An interview was conducted with the Human Resources Group Consultant, who is one of the project managers of the current campaign being driven to revitalize the organisational culture and business strategy of the organisation. Information regarding the details of this campaign and further details regarding the sub-cultures that exist within this organisation was requested.

In addition, the Employment Equity Manager was interviewed to ascertain what the organisation's status is in terms of employment equity policies and what organisational support is offered to employees placed through employment equity. Following this participant's recommendation, an interview was conducted with a Performance Consultant at the organisation's business school. More detailed information regarding the specific programmes which are conducted at the business school with regard to employment equity and cultural diversity was requested.

The Executive General Manager of Human Resources was consulted regarding the general logistics of the procedure of the study and selection criteria of participants.

A detailed discussion of the development of materials and procedures adopted for data collection and analysis for Part One and Part Two of the study follows.

3.6.2. Part One

3.6.2.1. Development of Materials

This study made use of a self-administered rating scale which was designed by the researcher. It consisted of a Likert Semantic Differential scale of 1 – 5, which measured **appropriateness** and **message interference of 20 communication skills**, across **three situations**. It was based partly on a rating scale used by Joss (1997) to evaluate perceptions of stutterers and their supervisors regarding stuttering in the workplace. Certain communication parameters and the rating scale in The Profile of Communicative Appropriateness, developed by Penn (1998), were also considered for this questionnaire. Separate rating scales were designed to obtain participants' **ratings of colleagues** and participants' **ratings of themselves**. The decision to ask participants to rate themselves

was based on recent literature which suggests that self-knowledge induces attitudes that facilitate good intercultural behaviour (Steyn, 1994).

The specific communication skills examined in this study were selected from:

- ◆ International and South African research on intercultural communication in South Africa which focused on specific communication skills (see Dean & Popp, 1990; Mammam, 1995; McDaniel & Anderson, 1998; Parry, 1994; Remland, Jones & Brinkman, 1995; Rubin, DeHart & Heintzman, 1991; Van Jaarsveld, 1998),
- ◆ The Profile of Communicative Appropriateness (Penn, 1998)
- ◆ The researcher's perusal of various recently established communication skills training programmes in South Africa aimed at improving and/or changing various communication skills of business employees, and
- ◆ The researcher's personal perceptions and experiences of intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication skills in South Africa.

Judgments of appropriateness depend on the contexts in which behaviours occur, as the context in which a communicative event takes place shapes the event (Smith & Leinon, 1992). Three communication situations: **telephone, business meeting, and informal contact**, were selected as employees are likely to encounter them in their daily work routines (Adey & Andrew, 1990).

According to Steyn (1997), the two main dimensions of communication competence are generally taken to be appropriateness and effectiveness. The primary thrust of research in competence has to identify the attributes of knowledge, attitude and behaviour that characterise effective intercultural communicators. Such attributes are considered predictors of success in intercultural interactions. Thus, the **two scales of measurement** that were used in this study referred to **appropriateness** and to effectiveness in communication by measuring **message interference**. Both were 5-point Likert Semantic Differential Rating Scales, which are generally used to generate data for attitude assessment (Howell, 1995; Silverman, 1993 cited in Joss, 1997).

(a) Appropriateness

Smith and Leinonen (1992) report that the issue of (in)appropriateness is central to an investigation of communication breakdown as "part of one's communicative and pragmatic competences is the ability to judge behaviours as appropriate and

inappropriate within the confines of the norms of one's culture and to communicate oneself within these norms" (pp. 117). They point out that the 'grey area' that lies between the two extremes of appropriate and inappropriate is motivated by specific norms that are generated by culture, individual preferences, different situations, environments and relationships. Appropriacy is ultimately a subjective experience on the part of the observer and is dependent on one's life experiences, one's purpose for the observation, one's tolerance for 'the unusual' and other such factors. However, some consensus does appear to exist with regard to behaviours being communicatively inappropriate in specific contexts (Smith and Leinonen, 1992).

The following carrier-phrase was used to ensure that the ratings were performed according to a uniform structure:

- ◆ **TO BLACK PARTICIPANTS:** "In your opinion, the *performance of your white male colleagues* in this area of communication is..."
- ◆ **TO WHITE PARTICIPANTS:** "In your opinion, the *performance of your black male colleagues* in this area of communication is..."
- ◆ **TO PARTICIPANTS RATING THEMSELVES:** "In your opinion, *your performance* in this area of communication is..."

The labels on this scale refer to levels of appropriateness, as defined by participants' own perceptions of what constitutes (in)appropriateness. The points on the scale are defined as follows: 1 = completely appropriate; 2 = highly appropriate; 3 = slightly appropriate; 4 = slightly inappropriate; 5 = completely inappropriate.

(b) Message Interference

This scale of measurement was not included in the researcher's previous study (Brewis, 1999) and as a result, the findings of the study did not provide enough information regarding the degree to which certain communication skills interfere with message understanding during intercultural communication in the workplace.

The following carrier-phrase was used to introduce this scale of measurement:

- ◆ **TO BLACK PARTICIPANTS:** "In your opinion, the *performance of your white male colleagues* in this area of communication negatively interferes with message understanding..."

- ◆ **TO WHITE PARTICIPANTS:** “In your opinion, the *performance of your black male colleagues* in this area of communication negatively interferes with message understanding...”
- ◆ **TO PARTICIPANTS RATING THEMSELVES:** “In your opinion, *your performance* in this area of communication negatively interferes with message understanding...”

The labels on this scale were as follows: 1 = never; 2 = occasionally; 3 = half of the time; 4 = often; 5 = always.

Table 3 on the following page depicts the rating scale that was used for white participants to rate their black colleagues.

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Table 3: Rating Scale of Communication Appropriateness and Message Interference for White Participants

Appropriateness

In your opinion, the performance of your black male colleagues in this area of communication is:

- 1 = appropriate
- 2 = mostly appropriate
- 3 = sometimes appropriate
- 4 = mostly inappropriate
- 5 = inappropriate

Message Interference

In your opinion, the performance of your black male colleagues in this area of communication interferes with message understanding:

- 1 = never
- 2 = occasionally
- 3 = half of the time
- 4 = often
- 5 = always

	ON THE TELEPHONE		IN A BUSINESS MEETING		ON AN INFORMAL BASIS	
	Appropriateness	Message understanding	Appropriateness	Message understanding	Appropriateness	Message understanding
RATE OF SPEECH						
LOUDNESS OF SPEECH						
ACCENT						
SPEECH CLARITY						
RHYTHM OF SPEECH						
ORGANISATION OF CONTENT						
PROFESSIONAL TERMINOLOGY						
TOPIC CONTROL						
TURN-TAKING						
GREETINGS						
LISTENING SKILLS						
REACTION TO COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN						
HANDSHAKE	Not applicable					
FACIAL EXPRESSION						
BODY POSTURE						
BODY SPACE						
PHYSICAL CONTACT						
GESTURES						
EYE GAZE						
GROOMING						

As can be seen in Table 3, the rating scale included 20 communication skills, 3 communication settings and 2 scales of measurement. Each subject was given a label (e.g. B1, W1) to distinguish between black and white participants and a code to distinguish between ratings of colleagues (C) and ratings of self (S). This information appeared at the top of each questionnaire.

3.6.2.2. Procedure

Once the Human Resources Department had granted the researcher permission to conduct the study within the organisation, the researcher was provided with a computer-generated list of all the black and white employees who met the selection criteria specified by the researcher. This list formed the sample frame – an essential part of random sampling. According to Katzenellenbogen et al (1999), a sample can only be representative if the original frame contains all the individuals in the study population.

Random sampling is a “selection tool which can ensure that one’s sample is representative of the population, since each individual in the study population has a known chance (probability) of being included in the sample.” Using Epi Info (Version 6), 45 black and 45 white employees were randomly selected from this list and were then approached by the researcher regarding participation in the study. Twenty-six black and 26 white employees agreed to participate.

The researcher met with participants individually. Prior to completing the rating scale:

- ◆ Participants were provided with a brief explanation of the **background and aims** of the study
- ◆ **Biographical information** was obtained from participants, to ensure that they met the selection criteria for the study (see Appendix 3)
- ◆ Participants were provided with **definitions of the communication skills** included in the rating scale and **explicit instructions** on how to complete the rating scale (see Appendix 4). This was to ensure that participants had an identical frame of reference when rating their colleagues. Careful consideration was given to the language and choice of vocabulary utilised within the definitions. Although many of the communication skills were self-explanatory, definitions were provided. Definitions were based on current literature. Linguistic jargon was eliminated as far as possible,

as "brevity, simplicity and accuracy were the primary targets for all items included" (Joss, 1997, pp. 13).

Participants were then required to complete two rating scales:

- ◆ One to rate their black/white colleagues; and
- ◆ One to rate themselves.

The researcher was present at all times while participants completed the rating scales. This is in accordance with Katzenellenbogen et al. (1999) who report that although self-administered questionnaires require participants to fill in the questionnaire by themselves, an interviewer may stand by to assist with any problems that may arise.

3.6.2.3. Setting and Time

The researcher met with participants in a quiet room at the organisation's South African headoffice in Cape Town. The explanation of the questionnaire and instructions by the researcher and the completion of the questionnaire by the participants took between 25 and 40 minutes.

3.6.3. Part Two

This part of the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with sixteen of the participants (eight black, eight white) who were involved in Part One of the study. Steyn (1997) suggests that such intercultural communication studies conducted in Africa should be designed to acknowledge the current recognition that the use of narratives is receiving in qualitative research (Rosaldo, 1989 and Jackson 1989 cited in Steyn, 1997).

3.6.3.1. Development of Materials

It was necessary to construct a set of questions as a basis for the semi-structured interviews for Part Two of the study.

Questions were based on a number of central themes that were felt to be relevant to this particular study.

Table 4: Themes Included in the Interviews

Rating scales used in Part One of study – overall impressions, problems, etc.
Perceptions of colleagues' communication in general and across specific situations
Perceptions of own communication in general and across specific situations
Need for, availability of and involvement in training related to cultural diversity and intercultural communication
Other issues impacting on intercultural communication in the organisation

Please refer to Appendix 5 for examples of questions that were included in the Part Two interviews.

(a) Principles Underlying the Construction of the Interviews

♦ *Semi-structured vs Unstructured Interviewing*

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, that is they followed the well-defined structure of the questionnaires, but allowed for deviation from these questionnaires for varying clarification techniques and additional questioning where necessary. A certain degree of systematicisation in questioning is said to be indicated when many informants are interviewed (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

In addition, the employment of a semi-structured interviewing method allowed the researcher to partially control the length of the interviews, thereby limiting the length of the transcription. Considering that an hour long interview can take up to eight hours to transcribe (Katzenellenbogen et al., 1999), limiting the length of the interviews was necessary.

In addition, a semi-structured interview was chosen above an unstructured interview, since an unstructured interview was thought to be beyond the scope of this study. This is due to the fact that the interviewer who directs such an interview requires much skill and experience in interviewing in order to avoid poor reliability as a result of increased subjectivity (Katzenellenbogen et al., 1991).

◆ *Types of Questions*

Mostly open-ended questions were employed, as they allow a wide scope for the participants to define their views from their own perspective. Following participants' responses to interview questions, the researcher was able to probe further where it was felt necessary to elicit more in-depth data and obtain more opinionated or emotional responses from the participants (Parry, 1994; Patton, 1990).

◆ *Language and Phrasing of Questions*

All interviews were conducted in English and questions were phrased in such a way that they would be concise and unambiguous.

3.6.3.2. Procedure

Once Part One of the study was complete, sixteen of these participants, eight white and eight black, were requested to volunteer to participate in a semi-structured interview. All participants were interviewed individually, which is in line with Lutz, Chalmers, Lockerbie & Hepburn's (1992) recommendations that interviews should preferably be conducted with the respondent alone, in a place of reasonable comfort and away from disturbance. All sessions and interviews were recorded onto audiotape and transcribed. The transcriptions formed the database for analysis.

3.6.3.3. Setting and Time

All interviews were recorded at the organisation's South African headoffice in Cape Town. This is in accordance with Katzenellenbogen et al. (1991), who suggest that qualitative research needs to be carried out in as naturalistic environment as possible as this shows acknowledgement of the influence that the situation has on behaviour and that behaviour has on situations (Cassell & Symon, 1997).

The length of the interviews ranged from 30 - 45 minutes. In total, approximately ten hours of interview material were recorded.

3.6.4. Feedback to Organisation

“Research that is maximally participative, and in which data is fed back to participants, can enhance the participants’ insight into their situations” (Lather, 1989 cited in Steyn, 1997, pp. 71). Thus, the fourth and final part of this study involved the researcher’s feedback of the results of the study to key role players in the organisation. This involved a presentation by the researcher to the Executive General Manager of Human Resources and to the Employment Equity Forum. In addition, a full copy of this research report will be made available to the organisation.

3.6.5. Summary of Data Collection

A summary of the process of data collection is represented in the flow diagram in Figure 5.

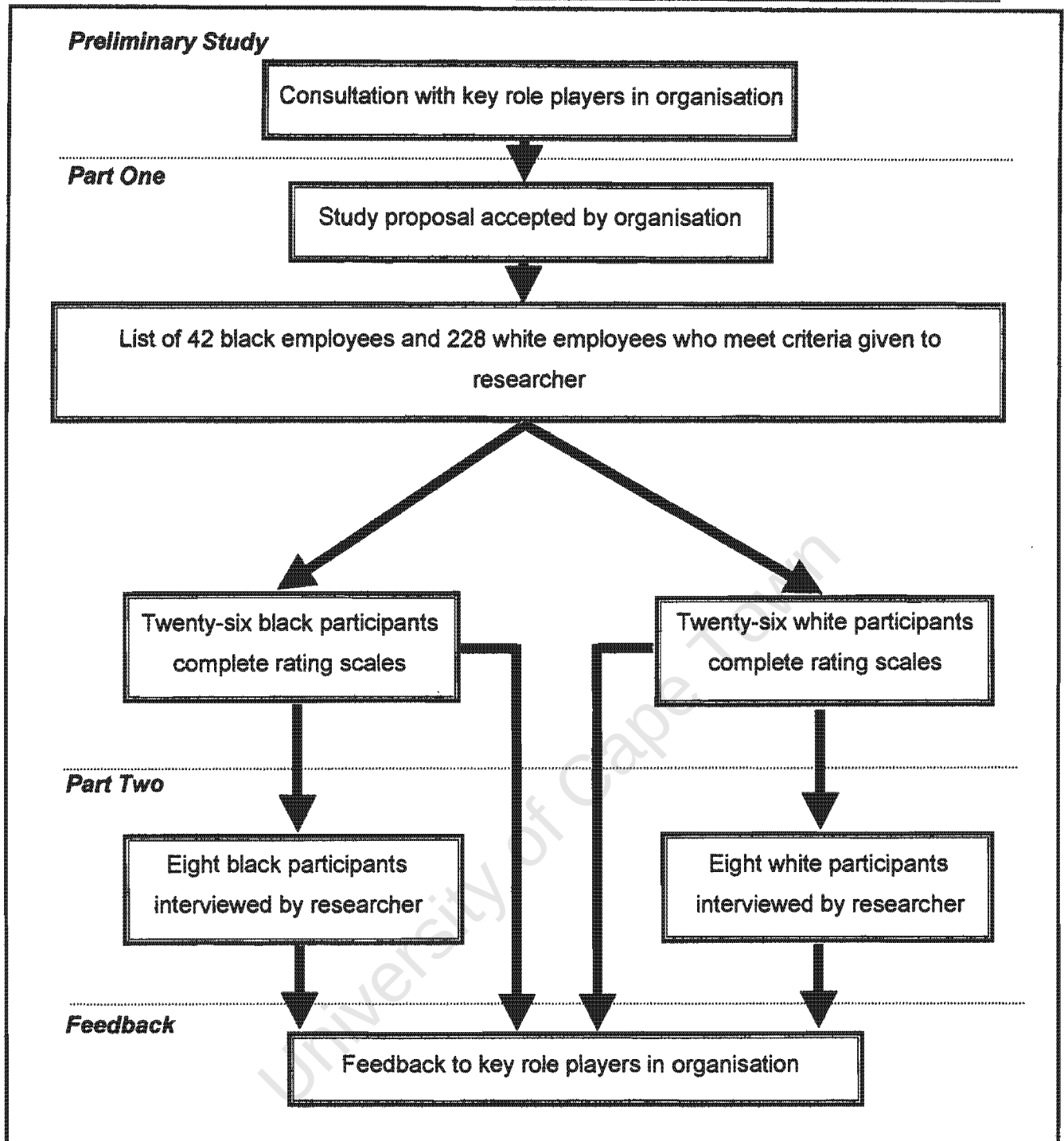


Figure 5: Summary of Process of Data Collection

Fifty-two rating scales and sixteen interview transcriptions were submitted for data treatment and data analysis.

An examination of the qualitative analysis procedures which was obtained from a number of sources (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Michelson, 1998) allowed for the development of the procedure depicted in Figure 6.

These stages will now be discussed in more detail:

(a) Stage One: Organisation of the Data

The first step of the analysis procedure was to ensure that all raw data had been gathered and was available for analysis. The transcription of the interviews, as well as numerous additional read-throughs of the raw data allowed the researcher to become familiar with the information, thereby facilitating further analysis (Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

(b) Stage Two: Initial Classification of the Data

This stage marked the beginning of the coding process which takes place in content analysis. The researcher was required to read through each of the sixteen typed transcripts from the semi-structured interviews and make comments in the margins. These comments included ideas and perceptions of particular observations, sentences and paragraphs. Each of these incidents, ideas or events, in turn were given a label (using the MS Word "Highlight Changes" function) that was felt to represent that phenomenon. Incidents were then compared so that common phenomena would receive common names (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The data was conceptualised in this way to facilitate the large amount of raw data in the transcriptions. Each phenomenon was allocated its own MS Word file.

(c) Stage Three: Generate Categories, Themes and Patterns

Once the phenomena had been identified and all MS Word "phenomena files" were printed, they were grouped together into categories. Categories were given names that were more abstract than the concept names, but were still felt to be transparent enough to remind the researcher of the raw data. Categories were further developed in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). These characteristics formed the basis for differentiating categories and sub-categories.

Patton (1990) suggests that data should be organised into topics and files. As mentioned previously, each category was allocated a separate MS Word document. After completing a detailed coding procedure, the information pertaining to that topic was then cut from the documents containing original raw data and placed into the category document.

At this stage of the analysis, categories were examined for divergence, convergence and completeness as proposed by Guba (1985 cited in Patton, 1990). This entails “fleshing out” patterns and categories in order to determine what could be appropriately fitted together in particular categories. This was achieved by:

- ◆ Looking for regularities in the data
- ◆ Judging categories in terms of internal homogeneity (the extent to which data in a category holds together) and external homogeneity (the extent to which differences in a category are bold and clear).
- ◆ Working back and forth between data and classification systems to verify meaningfulness and accuracy of placement of data within certain categories.
- ◆ Prioritising categories, by determining which categories were more important according to features of saliency, uniqueness and credibility.
- ◆ Sets of categories being tested for completeness by:
 - Extension: building on items of information already known.
 - Bridging: making connections between different items.
 - Surfacing: proposing new information that should fit and verifying its existence.

At this stage certain categories were joined together to form themes, while other categories were reduced to variables in the study. Themes are defined by Ely (1991) as statements of meaning that run through all or most of the important data. Their impact is thought to be primarily emotive and factual (Ely, 1991). Categories were also laid out in terms of priority so that they could be reported on in this order in the Results & Discussion section of the study.

(d) Stage Four: Challenge Emergent Hypotheses

At this point, the data was searched in order to challenge the established hypotheses and to find information that may not be in agreement with the hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

(e) Stage Five: Search for Alternative Explanations

When challenging the patterns that seemed to be apparent, alternative explanations were sought out, identified and described. It was deemed necessary to demonstrate why a particular explanation was the most plausible (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

3.9. RELIABILITY

According to Katzenellenbogen et al (1999), "data is only as good as the measurement instruments used to measure the characteristics. Any deviation from this constitutes measurement error" (pp. 90). Measures are usually considered in terms of their reliability and validity. Research is said to be trustworthy if the research process is carried out fairly and the product is closely representative of the informants involved. Thus, a number of methods were employed in this study in order to enhance and determine the rigour of the data analysis procedure utilised in Part Two of this study. This had to be undertaken at a number of different levels to ensure that the data was accurate throughout.

3.9.1. Subjective Assessment of Interviews

Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote down brief field notes on the positive and negative aspects of the each session, as well as the researcher's feeling about the responsiveness of the informants. In order to make this as easy and as quick as possible to administer, the researcher constructed a short checklist to be used after each interview. The checklist was based on suggestions from several researchers (Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Evans, 2000) and included comments on the following:

- ◆ Others present during the interview
- ◆ Distractions during the interview
- ◆ Interviews affected by others present and distractions
- ◆ Participant characteristics
- ◆ General
- ◆ Equipment check
- ◆ Ideas from the interview which needed to be followed up.

3.9.4. Confirming the Accuracy of Data Preparation for Thematic Analysis

A total of 202 pages of transcription from the interviews were prepared for data analysis. The researcher re-checked a random 20% of this data to ensure that the decisions which had been made pertaining to the following were consistent:

- ♦ Division into propositions
- ♦ Matching of propositions
- ♦ Contribution of propositions
- ♦ Neutrality of propositions

3.9.5. Validating the Data at the Level of Thematic Analysis

Validation of the data at this level was based on suggestions by Patton (1990), Polgar and Thomas (1991), DePoy and Gitlin (1994), and Katzenellenbogen et al (1999). These suggestions are outlined below.

3.9.5.1. Audit trail

It has been reported that in qualitative research such as this, the researcher is more a part of the phenomenon being investigated than in quantitative research (Polgar & Thomas, 1991). However the advantages of using a human measuring instrument, is that we are more adaptable and multi-purpose than even the most sophisticated machinery and we can observe subtle behavioural changes as well as verbal and non-verbal cues in our participants.

One way of indicating the train of thought of the researcher, is through an audit trail. An audit trail refers to the thinking and action processes involved in obtaining results and involves the researcher reporting on his or her train of thought (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). This was felt to be achieved via the following: post-session field notes, notes on procedures in methodology, notes on the construction of materials in the methodology and notes on the utilisation of the constructed materials in the methodology.

3.9.5.2. Triangulation

Triangulation is a process whereby one source of information is checked against one or more other sources of information (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). According to Patton (1990),

the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena, strengthens the study design. It can involve using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Any given study can include several mixes of the approaches by including several measurement approaches, varying design approaches and varying different analytical approaches to achieve triangulation (Patton, 1990). Using triangulation is recognition that the researcher needs to be open to more than one way of looking at things.

Denzin (1978 cited in Patton, 1990) stated that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. Furthermore, each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, and consequently multiple methods should be employed in every investigation.

Three basic types of triangulation specified by Denzin (1978 cited in Patton, 1990) were used to strengthen the validity of this research in the following ways:

(a) Data triangulation (the use of a variety of different data sources in one study)

The following different types of data were compared:

- ◆ Rating scales from Part One could be compared with perceptions that were elicited during the Part Two interviews
- ◆ Field notes.

(b) Theory triangulation (the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data)

Qualitative research is data-driven as opposed to being theory-driven. Theory is generated from the data collected i.e. it is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Cassell & Symon, 1997). This allows for flexibility in the process of conducting research and allows the researcher to formulate new hypotheses and alter old ones as the research progresses (Cassell & Symon, 1997).

(c) Methodological triangulation (the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or programme)

Methodological triangulation was used in that quantitative data (from the questionnaires) could be compared to the qualitative interview data.

In Chapter 4, the results of the study will be presented.

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this section, the findings from the questionnaires and interviews with the participants, regarding intercultural communication in the workplace, are presented and discussed. The results are considered under each of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The themes are listed in Table 6 below.

Table 6: List of Themes

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS
PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES
SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT
TRAINING AND SUPPORT

4.1. LINGUISTIC ASPECTS

In this section, the results of the study regarding the linguistic aspects of intercultural communication will be presented. Section 4.1.1. will describe the results in terms of communication across specific situations in the workplace. Section 4.1.2. describes the details of the specific linguistic categories focused upon in this study:

- ♦ Vocal aspects
- ♦ Control of semantic content
- ♦ Sociolinguistic sensitivity
- ♦ Non-verbal communication

The findings of this study indicated overall satisfaction across participants in relation to their colleagues' and their own communication skills in the workplace, in terms of appropriateness and message interference. Thus, although the discussions below highlight and discuss significant differences and interactions between participants' ratings, it should be noted that *in general, communication was rated favourably*. However, when participants were interviewed about more specific communication

situations and specific aspects of their colleagues' communication, a variety of responses were revealed.

4.1.1. Communication across Specific Situations in the Workplace

As discussed in the methodology of this study, participants were required to rate and comment on communication skills across three communicative situations: telephone, business meeting and informal contact. Black participants were required to rate their white colleagues and white participants were required to rate their black colleagues. In addition, all participants were required to rate themselves. The major findings relating to intercultural communication across these three situations within this organisation will now be presented and discussed.

4.1.1.1. Telephone

Due to the extensive use of e-mail and the fact that employees generally work in close proximity to each other, telephonic intercultural communication is fairly limited in this organisation. However, interesting findings emerged from the questionnaires which were generally in agreement with the information obtained from the interviews.

Table 7: Ratings of Communication Appropriateness on the Telephone

FORM	RACE	RATING	MEAN	STD. ERROR	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		NOTES
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	3.167	.168	2.836	3.498	*
		Self	2.210	.154	1.907	2.513	
	Black	Colleague	2.510	.151	2.212	2.807	*
		Self	2.237	.177	1.889	2.585	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	2.131	.147	1.842	2.420	
		Self	1.700	.134	1.435	1.965	
	Black	Colleague	2.375	.132	2.115	2.635	
		Self	1.697	.154	1.394	2.001	✓
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	2.270	.161	1.953	2.586	
		Self	1.813	.147	1.523	2.103	✓
	Black	Colleague	2.705	.144	2.421	2.990	*
		Self	1.526	.169	1.194	1.859	✓
Labels on appropriateness scale: 1: "completely appropriate" to 5: "completely inappropriate"							
✓ = most appropriate * = least appropriate							

Table 8: Ratings of Message Interference on the Telephone

			MEAN	STD. ERROR	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		NOTES
FORM	RACE	RATING			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	3.107	.174	2.764	3.450	*
		Self	2.280	.160	1.966	2.594	
	Black	Colleague	2.615	.157	2.307	2.924	*
		Self	2.276	.183	1.916	2.637	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	2.048	.140	1.771	2.324	
		Self	1.810	.129	1.557	2.063	✓
	Black	Colleague	2.202	.126	1.954	2.450	
		Self	1.711	.147	1.420	2.001	✓
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	2.032	.154	1.728	2.336	
		Self	1.893	.142	1.615	2.172	
	Black	Colleague	2.526	.139	2.252	2.799	*
		Self	1.649	.162	1.330	1.969	✓
Labels on message interference scale: 1: "never" to 5: "always"							
✓ = least message interference * = most message interference							

Table 7 and 8 above reveal that the ratings for the *most appropriate* category with the *least message interference* on the telephone were *black participants' ratings of their own sociolinguistic sensitivity* (M [appropriateness] = 1.526; M [message interference] = 1.649). These findings were supported by the findings from the interviews, where some black participants indicated that they felt that their own listening skills were extremely good. Furthermore, a number of white participants indicated that their black colleagues' listening skills were better than their own. This finding will be discussed in more detail in section 4.1.2.3.

As can be seen in Table 7 and 8, the ratings for the **least appropriate category** with the **most message interference** were **white participants' ratings of their black colleagues' vocal aspects** on the telephone. White participants generally perceived the appropriateness of their black colleagues' vocal aspects to be between the rating scale's labels of "sometimes appropriate" and "mostly inappropriate" ($M = 3.167$). White participants' ratings of message interference indicated that their black colleagues' vocal aspects interfere with message understanding approximately "half of the time" on the telephone ($M = 3.107$).

This finding was supported by the interview data, as white participants reported that their black colleagues' accents sometimes affect speech clarity on the telephone. In accordance with Brewis' (1999) study, there was no evidence to suggest that accent is problematic across other communicative situations. However, it is felt that the lack of non-verbal communication on the telephone emphasises verbal difficulties and thus increases the risk of communication breakdown. In support of this, certain black participants revealed that they do not enjoy communicating telephonically as they prefer to accompany their verbal communication with non-verbal communication so as to ensure understanding.

- B7P5²: *I find it very difficult to talk to someone I am not looking at...*
- B6P5: *...if I'm talking to someone that I can see, like face-to-face, it tends to be better...cos I can use hand gestures and other stuff. When over the phone all I can use are words and verbal communication is not my forte...so I tend to prefer face-to-face or business meetings rather than the telephone conversation.*

Similarly, some **black participants experience difficulties with their white colleagues' vocal aspects on the telephone**. Table 7 and 8 reveal that black participants' ratings of their white colleagues' vocal aspects were less favourable than ratings of other areas of communication on the telephone. This referred to ratings of appropriateness ($M = 2.51$) and ratings of message interference ($M = 2.615$). Participants attributed this to their white colleagues' fast rate of speech and first language proficiency in English, which sometimes makes it difficult to keep up with the pace of conversation. For some black employees, the problem is so severe that they reported avoiding or reducing communication breakdown on the telephone by asking their colleague to send them an e-mail before telephoning them.

² B = black participant; W = white participant; R = researcher; P = page (from original transcript)

On the other hand, some participants, both black and white, indicated that they are able to relax more on the telephone as it is not as intimidating as a business meeting.

- *B2P6: ...on the telephone, it's quite more relaxed, and there's no direct confrontation...so you can actually express yourself and talk freely.*
- *W6P6: ... on the telephone I'm a little bit more relaxed, maybe I can...you know, maybe stare into air and think about things instead of...you know, in a meeting you have to look at someone.*

4.1.1.2. Business Meeting

A number of general trends emerged from the questionnaires and interviews regarding intercultural communication in a formal business meeting setting within the organisation.

Many black and white participants felt that they communicate best in a business meeting. This finding was based on the questionnaire results, as all average ratings fell within the 'appropriate' and 'minimal message interference' categories. Tables 9 and 10 illustrate the findings from the questionnaire regarding communication in a business meeting.

Table 9: Ratings of Communication Appropriateness in a Business Meeting

					95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		
FORM	RACE	RATING	MEAN	STD ERROR	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	NOTES
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	2.783	.161	2.466	3.099	*
		Self	2.240	.154	1.937	2.543	
	Black	Colleague	2.269	.151	1.972	2.567	*
		Self	2.132	.177	1.784	2.479	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	2.000	.140	1.724	2.276	
		Self	1.710	.134	1.445	1.975	
	Black	Colleague	2.173	.132	1.913	2.433	
		Self	1.592	.154	1.288	1.896	✓
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	1.942	.154	1.640	2.245	
		Self	1.760	.147	1.470	2.050	
	Black	Colleague	2.410	.144	2.126	2.695	*
		Self	1.614	.169	1.281	1.947	✓
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	White	Colleague	1.880	.145	1.594	2.167	
		Self	1.645	.139	1.370	1.920	
	Black	Colleague	2.048	.137	1.778	2.318	
		Self	1.507	.160	1.191	1.822	✓
Labels on appropriateness scale: 1: "completely appropriate" to 5: "completely inappropriate"							
✓ = most appropriate * = least appropriate							

Table 10: Ratings of Message Interference in a Business Meeting

			MEAN	STD ERROR	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		NOTES
FORM	RACE	RATING			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	2.565	.166	2.237	2.893	*
		Self	2.320	.160	2.006	2.634	
	Black	Colleague	2.462	.157	2.153	2.770	*
		Self	2.092	.183	1.731	2.453	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	1.859	.134	1.595	2.123	
		Self	1.800	.129	1.547	2.053	
	Black	Colleague	2.212	.126	1.963	2.460	
		Self	1.539	.147	1.249	1.830	✓
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	1.710	.148	1.420	2.001	
		Self	1.827	.142	1.548	2.105	
	Black	Colleague	2.449	.139	2.176	2.722	*
		Self	1.702	.162	1.382	2.021	
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	White	Colleague	1.489	.131	1.231	1.747	✓
		Self	1.735	.125	1.487	1.983	
	Black	Colleague	1.904	.123	1.661	2.147	
		Self	1.553	.144	1.269	1.837	✓
Labels on appropriateness scale: 1: "completely appropriate" to 5: "completely inappropriate"							
✓ = least message interference * = most message interference							

As can be seen in Table 9 and 10 above, the *most positive ratings* for communication in a business meeting related to *black participants' ratings of their own use of non-*

verbal communication (M [appropriateness] = 1.507; M [message interference] = 1.553). This finding contradicts the literature which suggests that non-verbal communication causes considerable communication breakdown in a multicultural workplace (Fielding, 1997; Fiske, 1990; Mammam, 1995; Steyn, 1996).

Black participants' ratings of their own control of semantic content was also rated as **highly appropriate with minimal message interference** in a business meeting (M [appropriateness] = 1.592; M [message interference] = 1.539). This finding was in opposition to information reported by black participants in the interviews, that the use of professional terminology and levels of language proficiency sometimes causes problems in a business meeting. On the other hand, a number of black participants indicated that their control of semantic content was better during a business meeting than in other situations, due to the formality of the setting and the tendency to prepare what one is going to say before one enters the meeting. This supports the finding that black participants rated their own control of semantic control higher in a business meeting than on the telephone and on an informal basis.

- *B7P4: In a formal situation...I'm more aware of myself and what I'm doing. I tend to kinda keep a close watch on myself...I think I probably communicate best in a business meeting.*

Although black participants' ratings of their white colleagues' control of semantic content was not unfavourable, many black participants reported that their white colleagues have poor turn-taking skills in business meetings and that because of this, their own contributions to meetings are limited as they often do not get a chance to speak.

- *B2P5: I don't know if it's a white thing...in a meeting, white people tend to...talk too much in a meeting...and they don't tend to create a room for you to come in...the thing is...taking turns and topic control go hand in hand. If you haven't had your turn in a topic then...it's never exhausted up until you say what you wanted to say. And it might be that the person who's kind of like trying to direct the proceedings one way or the other is never interested...if people are not good in taking turns then I don't think you can really say you have control over a topic...unless obviously...you're operating from an advantaged position...*

However, many white participants indicated that they often find their black colleagues to be submissive and less communicative in business meetings. This has numerous implications for the business world and will be discussed in more detail in a Chapter 5.

- **W4P1:**

W: In meetings he doesn't say anything...he is extremely quiet and hardly ever speaks in meeting...perhaps because of a lack of self esteem or something, perhaps he feels he doesn't have the knowledge within the team, um, I'm not really sure.

R: And, how do you generally react to that?

W: I don't... I leave it up to the manager to try and get something out of him, if he feels it necessary to do so.

Once again, some of the **most negative ratings** related to **black participants' ratings of their white colleagues' vocal aspects** (M [appropriateness] = 2.269; M [message interference] = 2.462) and **white participants' ratings of black colleagues' vocal aspects** (M [appropriateness] = 2.783; M [message interference] = 2.565). These findings were surprising and were largely unsupported by data from the interviews. However, a number of black participants did mention that their colleagues' rate of speech and the pace of conversation does sometimes pose difficulties for them in a business meeting. Many black participants attributed this to the fact that most of their white colleagues are first language English speakers and are thus more fluent in the English language than themselves. Although Afrikaans speaking colleagues are in the same situation, they usually have the option of resorting to Afrikaans if they are struggling to express themselves in English, as it is often the case that most employees in the meeting can understand Afrikaans. It appears that there is a general lack of sensitivity and consideration by white employees in this regard. The finding that white participants rated their black colleagues' vocal aspects in a business meeting poorly was surprising as white participants only reported their black colleagues' vocal aspects to be problematic on the telephone.

The other category which received the **most negative ratings** regarding communication in a business meeting related to **black participants' ratings of white colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity** (M [appropriateness] = 2.41; M [message interference] = 2.449). The results from the interviews support these finding as many black participants reported that their white colleagues tend to dominate conversations, have poor listening skills and inappropriate reactions to communication breakdown.

4.1.1.3. Informal Contact

Of the three communication situations discussed, communication on an informal basis seems to result in the most difficulties and the highest rate of communication breakdown

within this organisation. Numerous black and white participants suggested that this is because people do not concentrate on their communication skills in an informal situation as much as they do when they are communicating in a more formal situation in the workplace.

- *B7P4: ...informally there are a whole lot of things that are just bad cos I just tend to let myself go.*

Table 11 and 12 display the results obtained from the questionnaires regarding communication on an informal basis in the workplace.

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Table 11: Ratings of Communication Appropriateness on an Informal Basis

			MEAN	STD. ERROR	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		NOTES
FORM	RACE	RATING			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	2.720	.154	2.417	3.023	*
		Self	2.260	.154	1.957	2.563	
	Black	Colleague	2.520	.154	2.217	2.823	*
		Self	2.132	.177	1.784	2.479	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	2.000	.134	1.735	2.265	
		Self	1.740	.134	1.475	2.005	
	Black	Colleague	2.400	.134	2.135	2.665	
		Self	1.855	.154	1.552	2.159	
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	1.880	.147	1.590	2.170	
		Self	1.907	.147	1.617	2.197	
	Black	Colleague	2.667	.147	2.377	2.957	*
		Self	1.719	.169	1.387	2.052	✓
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	White	Colleague	1.865	.139	1.590	2.140	
		Self	1.700	.139	1.425	1.975	✓
	Black	Colleague	2.145	.139	1.870	2.420	
		Self	1.520	.160	1.204	1.835	✓
Labels on appropriateness scale: 1: "completely appropriate" to 5: "completely inappropriate"							
✓ = least message interference * = most message interference							

Table 12: Ratings of Message Interference on an Informal Basis

					95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL		
FORM	RACE	RATING	MEAN	STD. ERROR	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	NOTES
VOCAL ASPECTS	White	Colleague	2.550	.160	2.236	2.864	*
		Self	2.390	.160	2.076	2.704	
	Black	Colleague	2.600	.160	2.286	2.914	*
		Self	2.171	.183	1.810	2.532	
CONTROL OF SEMANTIC CONTENT	White	Colleague	1.780	.129	1.527	2.033	
		Self	1.840	.129	1.587	2.093	
	Black	Colleague	2.450	.129	2.197	2.703	
		Self	1.842	.147	1.552	2.132	
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SENSITIVITY	White	Colleague	1.720	.142	1.441	1.999	
		Self	1.907	.142	1.628	2.185	
	Black	Colleague	2.520	.142	2.241	2.799	*
		Self	1.825	.162	1.505	2.144	
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	White	Colleague	1.530	.125	1.282	1.778	✓
		Self	1.745	.125	1.497	1.993	✓
	Black	Colleague	1.975	.125	1.727	2.223	
		Self	1.638	.144	1.354	1.922	✓
Labels on appropriateness scale: 1: "completely appropriate" to 5: "completely inappropriate"							
✓ = least message interference * = most message interference							

Tables 11 and 12 above reveal that participants rated *their own non-verbal communication ability* on an informal basis as *highly appropriate* and indicated that it

results in *minimal message interference* in comparison to other communication categories (blacks: M [appropriateness] = 1.52; M [message interference] = 1.638; whites: M [appropriateness] = 1.7; M [message interference] = 1.745). Once again, this was a surprising finding as it contradicts previous literature (Fielding, 1997; Fiske, 1990; Mammam, 1995; Steyn, 1996).

Once again, *black participants' ratings of their own sociolinguistic sensitivity* was a category which received some of the most positive ratings regarding informal contact (M [appropriateness] = 1.719; M [message interference] = 1.825). This finding was supported by data from the interviews that indicated that black participants feel that their listening skills are one of their strongest communication skills. On the other hand, *black participants' ratings of white colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity* indicated that this is more inappropriate (M = 2.667) and interferes with message understanding more often (M = 2.52) than other communication categories. This was confirmed in the interviews, as the black participants noted that their white colleagues' listening skills and reaction to communication breakdown were particularly problematic when conversing in an informal setting in the workplace.

- B4P5: ...on an informal basis at times I just find that you know, this guy is not really...a good listener.

The *most negative ratings* regarding communication on an informal basis related to *white participants' ratings of their black colleagues' vocal aspects* (M [appropriateness] = 2.72; M [message interference] = 2.55). Similarly, *black participants' ratings of their white colleagues' vocal aspects* were lower than ratings for other communication categories (M [appropriateness] = 2.52; M [message interference] = 2.6). There was no data that emerged from the interviews to support this finding.

A number of issues arose during the interviews that suggest why intercultural communication on an informal basis is difficult and problematic in the workplace.

♦ *Socialisation in the Workplace*

Effective interaction in a multicultural workplace requires the ability to develop a range of social skills to deal with the heterogeneity of the workforce (Mammam, 1995). Socialization in the workplace was viewed in a positive light by most black participants in

this study, but only by a few white participants. White colleagues who make an effort to engage in informal discussions during work hours were generally viewed more positively by black participants than white colleagues who do not.

Many black participants reported that there is a lack of informal contact between employees from different cultures – both across and within business units. Black participants indicated that their white colleagues tend to be too work orientated and do not consider informal conversations to be an important aspect of daily work routines.

- *B3P3: ...whether I'm here or somewhere else I like to bring that element...of... just talking about something outside the office, in the office...but talk about something outside the office, just to set the tone, the mood...but most of the guys normally talk about work, work.*

Black participants suggested that this results in ignorance and a lack of appreciation between different cultures in the workplace.

- *B3P5: ...a simple thing like a braai... somebody said "I didn't know black people had braai's"...I mean I was like, "Please! What do you think we are? Out of space aliens or something?"*

While some black participants describe their white colleagues as being "too serious", other black participants reported instances of being dismissed by white colleagues when they have tried to initiate spontaneous informal conversation at the workplace.

- *B3P14: I like talking and I don't like people sitting for the whole day at their desks like zombies. I would just like sometimes for people to talk, let's get together and talk. Come over to my desk, say just for 20 minutes, and talk.*

- *W3P4:*

M: ... certain of my colleagues consider his informal chats that he has with them to be a little off the mark...He was speaking to a colleague of mine and I just happened to be passing after [B3] had left and basically it was comments like you know "I don't get what he's talking about" or "Why would he have brought that up?" at the time and that sort of thing but certainly from my level it's I think initially he has brought a culture of getting to know people a bit more, you know, within the area...The problem I think in our area is that we are a lot of specialists within our specific fields and we rely on somebody else to do their job and not so much...you know, there isn't a very family orientation to our area.

R: So, generally not very friendly?

M: Well, it is friendly, it's courteous... always courteous...it's a case of um...almost a compulsory "how you doing?", "how was your weekend" thing and then let's get down to business, whereas [B3] would just pop in...just to talk a bit...or to joke a bit, that sort of thing.

- *B3P5: The one thing I've realised is that black and white, there is a lot of ignorance and that...manifests itself in fear...I just wish we would talk more.*

♦ **Language Proficiency**

In this organisation, it appears that many first language Afrikaans speakers use Afrikaans during personal conversations. Most of the black participants that were interviewed work in fairly small departments and reported feelings of isolation and exclusion as they are not able to speak or understand Afrikaans.

- *B2P1:*

B: On an informal basis...it's a combination of Afrikaans, which I'm not that good at, and English, so it does create some sort of interference in a way...they use both languages at the same time...Most of the time on an informal basis, when we go out as a...team, which all the people are Afrikaans speaking, so when people are relaxed they tend to use their home language and they tend to mix the two, so in a way it does have an impact on the communication between the two of us.

R: How do you react when that happens?

B: I keep quiet and...it's not always a good idea to tell people what language they should use. They know you don't understand their language to some extent and...it's just that in a more relaxed environment and you of course can afford to miss out on what he's saying. Sometimes they explain them to you when you ask, "What did you say?", you know, sometimes it's not necessary to ask people all the time what did they say...because sometimes someone comments to them in Afrikaans and they respond back in Afrikaans and communication, in a way, gets broken like that.

♦ **Personal Interests and Experiences**

When colleagues of different cultures engage in informal discussions in the workplace, difficulties often arise because of different interests that people have outside the workplace. While it is acknowledged that personal preferences do affect the interests that employees have outside work hours, these interests are to a large extent culture-bound.

- *B4P7: I experience more difficulties...on an informal basis... with most of the people I interact with, my colleagues, our interests are basically different. People will emphasise more...having pets at home...cricket, talking rugby, you know? People are watching M-Net and I'm watching SABC1, so on an informal basis the conversation is not really common...at times I become at a disadvantage because I'm the only black African guy within the group, you know...*
- *B6P3: ...if you communicate with somebody who has the same interests as yourself - it's usually much easier than somebody who's got totally different interests.*

More specifically, the content of informal discussions in the workplace often revolves around sport. In South Africa, sporting interests are to a large extent culturally determined and therefore discussions on sport often results in a lack of common ground during informal contact in the workplace.

- *B4P5: He's a rugby fan, I'm a soccer fan (laughs), you know.*
- *B4P10: I would like to share the soccer results, a soccer match, but there's no-one because everyone is talking about rugby and everyone is talking about cricket.*
- *B3P3: ...we come from two different worlds. My world is soccer, their world is rugby, golf and cricket. But one has got to come in and try to blend...to find some commonality, you know, with your work group. We do sometimes talk about soccer...there are white colleagues who talk about soccer and...I get very excited when I find someone who does that...*

In addition, it seems that the content of informal conversations is often related to past experiences between colleagues at the organisation. Therefore at times it is more difficult for a newer employee to participate in such conversations when his length of employment has been much shorter than that of his colleagues. In this study, it was found that the average length of employment of white participants (6 years, 3 months) was much longer than that of the black participants (3 years, 5 months).

- *B4P7: They've [white colleagues] been in [the organisation] for quite some time. Actually, myself and [black female colleague] are fairly new. Ja, so...they will relate...they'll be reminiscent at times, ja...relate to old stories that happened... it's difficult to catch up, you know.*

Some black participants reported feelings of isolation and exclusion as a result of these difficulties. It became clear from the interviews that there is a definite need for increased

sensitivity, appreciation and tolerance of personal and cultural differences in relation to interests and experiences.

- *B4P10: ...we are from different backgrounds, we've got different interests. I think certain people need to be accommodating, especially...if you are the minority in that group. I think people should be given opportunity to share stuff, because...I will share stuff and these guys will find it like...kind of boring to them you know because...or unacceptable in a way you know...it can make me feel left out...which is not good, because I think there need be...there should be a balance between business, informal basis, you know...there should be a good balance there.*

4.1.2. Specific Linguistic Skills

As mentioned in the methodology, statistical tests were conducted between the participant factors of form (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact), race (i.e. black vs. white) and rating (i.e. ratings of colleague vs. ratings of self) to investigate whether significant differences existed within the categories of vocal aspects, control of semantic content, sociolinguistic sensitivity and non-verbal communication. The results of these analyses will be discussed together with the data that emerged from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

4.1.2.1. Vocal aspects

Vocal aspects convey valuable information about a speaker and include tone, volume and rate of speech. Much variation exists among cultures with regard to these aspects of communication and this increases the risk of negative perceptions during intercultural communication (e.g. Argyle, 1982; Fiske, 1990). According to Adey and Andrew (1990) and Hall (1995), problems with vocal aspects of communication can lead to dishonesty, hostility and humiliation, as individuals may be reluctant to admit that they did not understand. In this study, the vocal aspects of rate of speech, loudness of speech, accent, speech clarity and rhythm of speech were investigated.

As discussed previously, participants' ratings of their colleagues' vocal aspects received **the least favourable ratings for appropriateness and the least favourable ratings for message interference with regard to all three communication situations.**

Table 13: Significance Levels between Participant Factors - Ratings of Appropriateness (Vocal aspects)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	1.229	.294	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	8.008	.005	**
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	24.388	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	.286	.751	
FORM * RATING	2	.754	.471	
RACE * RATING	1	4.317	.039	*
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	.903	.407	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Table 14: Significance Levels between Participant Factors - Ratings of Message Interference (Vocal aspects)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	1.628	.198	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	2.958	.087	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	16.748	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	.238	.788	
FORM * RATING	2	.943	.391	
RACE * RATING	1	.027	.870	
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	1.433	.240	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Table 13 and 14 reveal that significant differences were found between *participants' ratings of their colleagues' vocal aspects and participant's ratings of their own vocal aspects*. These differences were significant in terms of ratings of appropriateness, $F_{(1,266)} = 24.388$; $p = .000$, and ratings of message interference, $F_{(1,266)} = 16.748$; $p = .000$. *Ratings of self were generally more favourable than ratings of colleagues*, which indicates that both black and white participants generally feel that their colleagues' vocal communication skills are less appropriate and furthermore, interfere with message understanding more often than their own do.

In addition, Table 13 reveals that the interaction between the participant factors of **ratings** and **race** regarding appropriateness of vocal aspects was significant, $F_{(1,266)} = 4.317$; $P = .039$. Figure 8 below depicts this interaction graphically.

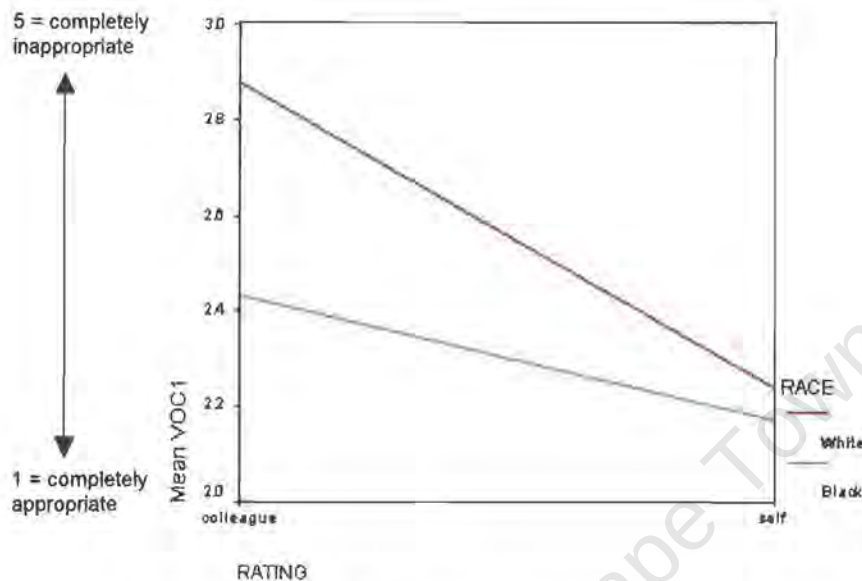


Figure 8: Ratings of Appropriateness (Vocal aspects)

The findings, as illustrated in Figure 8 above, are:

- Black ratings of white colleagues' vocal aspects > ³ white ratings of black colleagues' vocal aspects;
- Black ratings of own vocal aspects > white participants' ratings of own vocal aspects;
- All ratings of self > all ratings of colleagues.

These findings suggest that black employees' vocal aspects perhaps pose a higher risk of miscommunication than white employees' vocal aspects. In addition, the fact that employees perceive their own vocal aspects to be more appropriate than what their colleagues think they are, suggests that participants are not fully aware of their own areas of difficulty. The findings related to vocal aspects revealed from the questionnaires were supported by responses obtained during the interviews and will be discussed in detail below.

In this study, **loudness of speech and rate of speech** did not appear to be issues of contention. Most participants, both black and white, indicated that they do not mind

³ > = more appropriate

whether their colleagues' rate of speech is too fast or too slow, or whether their colleagues' loudness of speech is too loud or too soft, as long as message understanding is not affected. According to a few participants, both black and white, their colleagues' rate of speech occasionally posed problems on the telephone.

An interesting finding was that many black participants felt that a louder, deeper voice generally assisted with speech clarity and gaining an interlocutor's attention.

- *B4P3: He's got a very strong or fairly powerful voice and that helps in stressing certain points at times and for me to understand...you know...the importance of certain points...*
- *B1P17: ...his loudness of his voice .. and as I say, the rate of his speech...it makes you pay attention.*

Accent is a vocal aspect of communication which is often believed to be one of the main causes of communication breakdown and linguistic prejudice in intercultural communication (Rubin, DeHart, & Heintzman, 1991; Rubin & Smith, 1990). Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995) describe accent as "a particular way of speaking which tells the listener something about the speaker's background" (pp. 113), while Abercrombie (1967) suggests that accent refers to the indices of social characteristics, such as regional and status indices, that are present in pronunciation.

In this study, the findings suggest that there appears to be an appreciation for different accents within this organisation and employees do not find it inappropriate so long as it does not interfere with message understanding. The only time that accent seems to affect **speech clarity** is on the telephone. This was discussed in detail in section 4.1.2.1.

- *W2P4: ...most of the problems have been accent. You know, the blacks' accents, you just...sometimes you just can't understand, you really...especially on the phone, the phones are the worst. I don't know why, it's maybe just because you can't see the guy's mouth move or something, but it's always the phone that you really struggle to talk to on. And from experience, because I've worked in a service centre, we've had black people on our staff as well...and...a lot of times the clients would say, "No, please send me over to someone else" because they've got absolutely no idea what you're trying to say.*

Unlike the findings noted in Brewis' (1999) study where the majority of white participants felt uncomfortable to continually ask for clarification when speech clarity is affected, some

white participants in this study reported that they do feel comfortable in requesting clarification.

- *W4P1: ...sometimes...I struggle to follow him because of the accent specifically, um, I would say that's the only problem that I sometimes struggle with...but I would just then ask him to repeat or clarify with him to make sure that I understand what he is saying.*

Rubin and Smith (1990) suggest that individuals need to strive to improve their ability to listen to their language when it is spoken beyond the limits of their culture-bound experience and learn to differentiate between acceptably moderate levels of accent from unacceptably high levels. A white participant whose second language is Afrikaans suggested that second language white English speakers are adopting this approach towards their black colleagues' accents within this organisation:

- *W4P3: I imagine the accent is how he was brought up, like, I speak with an English/Afrikaans accent, so he speaks with his language accent or his background accent, so I don't think that's anything one would work on improving. I think it's a question of making sure that I understand, that it's my responsibility when he speaks to me that I understand what he's saying...Ja, you can practise as much as you like, but it'll always be your second language.*

Black participants and white second language English speaking participants often conveyed similar, self-conscious attitudes regarding their accent and pronunciation of English words.

- *W1P14: Ok, um, I'm Afrikaans so sometimes people might not understand what I'm trying to say, I don't know, um...obviously my pronunciation is not always...I always do um...presentations...and there're a couple of words that I rather keep away from (laughs)...then I'd say to people ok I'll just write it down. You know, sometimes I get it wrong and sometimes I just...stumble over the word. Um...that could improve I would say.*
- *B8P14: I try to pronounce my English as a Englishman as (much as) possible...*

A number of the black participants acknowledged the importance of **tone of voice** and general **intonation**. The use of intonation to capture and keep an interlocutor's attention emerged as an important communicative skill in business.

- *B6P2: ...maybe it's after lunch and you're going over something that you haven't done before. You want somebody to come up with a varied voice and something a bit...that is going to keep*

you awake, right? A monotonous voice, you know, is going to make you start doodling or... daydreaming. So I tend to think he has a monotonous voice. If he can sort of vary that, I think that might keep his listener's...you know...attention.

It is thus still unclear why the ratings of vocal aspects were low on the questionnaires, but were not highlighted as problematic during the interviews.

4.1.2.2. Control of Semantic Content

Control of semantic content refers to the way in which communicative components are organised in a unified way, thus the rules involved in this area of communication are complex (Penn, 1998; Smith & Leinonen, 1992). The ability to construct ideas logically and present them coherently are important aspects of this area of communication. According to Smith and Leinonen (1992), the term 'coherence' refers to the interrelatedness of senses, thoughts and ideas underneath the surface of discourse. In this study, control of semantic content refers to organisation of content, topic control, turn-taking and professional terminology.

Table 15: Significance Levels between Participant Factors - Ratings of Appropriateness (Control of Semantic Content)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	.977	.378	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	2.773	.097	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	32.610	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	.683	.506	
FORM * RATING	2	.320	.727	
RACE * RATING	1	2.845	.093	
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	.007	.993	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Table 16: Significance Levels between Participant Factors - Ratings of Message Interference (Control of Semantic Content)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	.933	.395	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	3.088	.080	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	18.547	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	1.665	.191	
FORM * RATING	2	.154	.858	
RACE * RATING	1	10.842	.001	**
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	.693	.501	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

As is shown in Table 15 and 16 above, significant differences were found between *participants' ratings of their colleagues' control of semantic content and participants' ratings of their own control of semantic content*. These differences were significant in terms of ratings of appropriateness, $F_{(1,266)} = 32.610$; $p = .000$, and message interference, $F_{(1,266)} = 18.547$; $p = .000$. As was the case with participants' ratings of vocal aspects of communication, participants' *ratings of their own control of semantic were generally higher than their ratings of their colleagues' control of semantic content*.

Furthermore, it can be seen from Table 16 that there was a **highly significant interaction between race and rating** with regard to message interference, $F_{(1,268)} = 10.842$; $p = .001$. This finding is similar to the significant interaction that was found with participants' ratings of appropriateness of vocal aspects. In this study The following graphical representation clearly depicts the nature of this interaction.

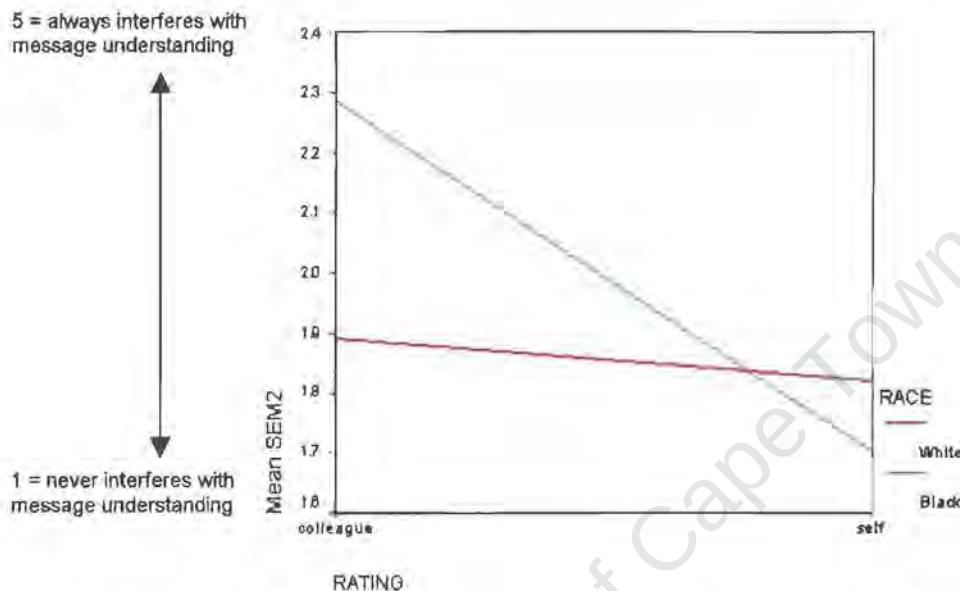


Figure 9: Ratings of Message Interference (Control of Semantic Content)

With reference to Figure 9, the following findings are clear:

- White ratings of black colleagues > ⁴ black ratings of white colleagues
- Black ratings of self > white ratings of self
- All ratings of self > all ratings of colleagues

Support for these findings and possible explanations emerged from the interviews. Black participants indicated that their white colleagues tend to dominate conversations in the workplace and allow them little chance to speak. Black participants also indicated that their white colleagues often use professional terminology that they are not always familiar with and which therefore results in communication breakdown. White participants indicated that they were aware of these issues and many reported that this area of their own communication needs improvement. These findings are discussed in detail below.

⁴ > = less message interference

According to numerous black and white participants, many problems related to control of semantic content can be attributed to an employee's **language proficiency in English**. Many participants who are second language English speakers reported that it often takes them longer to organise their thoughts in a logical manner, as they are continually translating information before they speak. Due to the proficiency of first language English speakers, this problem is exacerbated. These findings support Kaschula and Anthonissen's (1995) belief that the use of English as a *lingua franca* in South African organisations is a potential barrier to achieving effective communication.

- B4P9: *...when I'm thinking, I don't think in English, you know, I think in Xhosa and I have to translate into English. And...sometimes I feel there's no logical flow of ideas and events, you know...we're in a very professional environment. It's because of that. Whatever I do I must first translate...from Xhosa into English...which...which might be very difficult at times...and...these guys around you they just flow because...they are mother tongue, you know? They think in English, speak in English, yeah, that kind of thing. I would have been at an advantage if I were to think in Xhosa, speak in Xhosa, if you get what I'm saying.*

As was the case with accent, the white first language Afrikaans speaking participants who were interviewed empathised with the difficulties that black second language English speakers experience, and vice versa.

- B1P16: *[He is] Afrikaans speaking, but he [has a] very good command of English as well. I mean, Afrikaans speaking - we might also be battling together with him, you know, because terminology and other things in life... there's a common struggle to understand this language.*

However, a number of black participants felt that white colleagues with English as their second language had a greater advantage than themselves, particularly in more formal settings. According to some black participants, Afrikaans speaking employees often resort to speaking in Afrikaans when they cannot express themselves in English. Many black participants feel that this is inconsiderate and insensitive and at times interpret code switching as a mechanism employed by white colleagues to convey superiority and power. This confirms the belief of many authors that language is "an important social organiser and cultural signifier, which positions speakers and listeners in certain relations of power" (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001, pp. 39). In South Africa, proficiency in English can become "a focal point for racism and stereotyping, and a powerful gate-keeper to maintain the status quo" (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001, pp. 39). There was an appeal by black

participants for more sensitivity from first language English speakers to multilingual speakers.

- B2P7: *...most these guys are people who, [if they] do not know what they are saying in English, can say it in their own language which makes it much more clearer...they can say it in their own language. But now with me, I can't, I'm stuck with one language.*
- B4P11: *I also find it difficult in certain situations...you'll go to a meeting and these guys will start conversing in Afrikaans and it becomes completely...difficult...I think it sometimes has unintended consequences in the sense that...the meeting will start in English and one person will just comment in Afrikaans and...whew! This whole thing now flows in Afrikaans, you know and...sometimes you are tired of always raising your hand and saying, "Guys, please be conscious. I'm here, I don't understand the language."*

This phenomenon was discussed by numerous black participants. Besides the feelings of resentment and isolation that result, it means that unless they continually ask for clarification, black employees potentially miss crucial information, as this information is conveyed in a language that they do not understand.

- B8P9: *...you can't really talk, you don't have a chance to utter a word of Sotho because nobody will understand you. But they...you are in a meeting, they are shooting a lot of things in Afrikaans, you will pick up a lot of things...Personally...I don't mind. As long as um you are not doing it to demean me...you go like, "Why are you talking Afrikaans?". Ok, and if you start to get things like "Ja, but it's my language", then you know that he's rude. Even you get people..."I don't have a proper English word for this", then you know at least the guy is trying to pass on the message...*

As noted by Steyn and Van Zyl (2001), some second language speakers recognise the fact that English is one of the important commercial and international languages and perceive learning it as a personal challenge.

- W4P7: *I mean English is the business language and I think the accepted language in S.A so you can't...I haven't got an issue with it and it's not going to go away...*
- B1P12: *There are things that you need to do for business reasons...and there are things that...you know you have to...I have to up my English for business reasons. I had to take that initiative and say I've got to speak better English - not that I'm speaking better English, it's still*

not my language and I know I battle with it, but I put in effort. That doesn't mean that I have to speak English like...10 hours a day.

Coherence and the ability to express oneself concisely to one's colleagues are important business communication skills (Fielding, 1997; Guffey, 1991). Many participants, both black and white, reported difficulties in organising their thoughts and expressing themselves logically and coherently.

- *W6P4: Firstly, I need to think through what I say far more carefully and then say it slowly...cos I often rush ahead and say things then realise I've said the wrong thing, you know, you just get all tripped up...*
- *B3P12: Um, when it comes to expressing myself, sometimes I babble away, I talk too fast, I get too eager to say something...um, and that's something I'm trying to work on...I need to be patient. I need to structure...my organisational content. I think that's very important, not to touch here and there, there, there. It's important to be able to report back, clearly in my head or even write out...and take my time and structure my sentences accordingly...whether I write an e-mail, whether it's vocal, I'm trying to perfect that.*

A number of participants, both black and white, noted that the technicality of the topic affects one's coherence. In turn, participants linked the technicality of conversation with the nature of one's job within an organisation.

- *W6P6: ...it's a lot to do with very technical things. When you're thrown with something very technical and you've got to try and get your mind around it and your mouth around it at the same time...you can become very tongue-tied...sometimes I would even say, "I'm not explaining this very well," because I can hear myself explaining it and it's just nonsense...I know what I want to say, but it's just not coming out right.*
- *B6P5: ...when it's business you want to know that you're coming across well and as usual you'll be talking about technical material, so you need to make sure that it's accurate as well.*

Although **written communication** was not an area of communication included in the questionnaire, a number of interviewees felt that their written communication is better than their verbal communication as one has more time to organise and express thoughts logically when writing something down.

- *W6P4: I'm far better in written communication, I mean that's been echoed by a couple of my managers, who say I can write extremely well, but when it comes to verbal communication I think my mind runs ahead of me and I trip over myself quite often.*
- *B6P4: I communicate better when I write and not when I talk...In my communication when writing I can rate myself amongst the best people who communicate...Ja, I've also written to...newspapers, Financial Mail...published in News Week...so my written communication is good...but when it comes to verbal communication I find that I don't have enough time to think things through and to construct sentences the way I would like to construct them on writing.*

In addition to coherence, **topic control** and **turn-taking** are two extremely important, closely related communication skills in business (Ruben, 1977). Turn-taking may be defined as "the conversational characteristic where a person who speaks first becomes a listener as soon as the person addressed takes his/her turn in the conversation by beginning to speak" (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995, pp. 116). It is based on the premise that turns are valued in conversation and that at least one but not more than one person speaks at any one time. It is thus a complex co-operative process in which the speaker and the listener try to co-ordinate their contributions so that overlap and silences are minimized, or feel comfortable for all speakers (Smith & Leinonen, 1992). Turn-taking plays an important role in determining how one is perceived in intra- and intercultural exchanges, as good use of turn-taking serves to indicate interest in and concern for the other person. If this skill is not being used appropriately, tension during intercultural exchanges is likely to increase (Ruben, 1977).

In support of this literature, employees who participated in this study reported problems with turn-taking and attributed it to various factors. Black participants expressed intense frustration with white colleagues who tend to dominate conversations, allowing little room for active participation. This confirms Ruben's (1977) suggestion that certain individuals are less proficient in governing their own contributions to an interactive situation and continue "with little regard for time sharing and initiation and termination preferences of others" (pp. 477). While a number of white participants alluded to this, most did not express an awareness of its implications.

- *B2P3: ...a lot of the times it's...rather a one-way communication, rather than a two-way communication. It's a one way and a half, not two-way, you know.*

Van Jaarsveld (1998) found significant differences between the turn-taking styles of various African groups and Western groups. Black participants discussed the relationship between culture, age and turn-taking in African cultures and indicated that following these rules potentially puts them at a disadvantage in the corporate world.

- *B2P9: ...in my culture, if someone old speaks, I don't speak. I wait until I'm given a chance. But in the white culture, they just communicate like that. So in a way, when it gets to the work environment, that actually affects you. 'Cos they are not used to communicating with someone when that person is speaking...we tend to be silent...and we end up not saying anything, not because you want to, but because the situation itself, the environment doesn't allow you to break in...sometimes I think it does create a lot of problems because they go on and on and on and sometimes get left outside.*

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that the use of **professional terminology** or **jargon** in business can be both advantageous and problematic. On the one hand, a number of the black and white second language English speaking participants reported that they encounter numerous communication problems which are due to unfamiliarity with professional terminology and colleagues' lack of awareness of this. This finding supports current literature which indicates that professional terminology or jargon tends to blur communication and make people feel excluded if they do not understand it (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Rutter, 1996). This is an issue that should be addressed as it can potentially lead to dishonesty on the part of listeners as they might be reluctant to admit that they do not understand the terminology (Adey & Andrew, 1990).

- *B2P5: Because of the jargon that's in the English, sometimes it's very difficult to put across what you want to say. And because of that variance you are not able to put across...effectively what you want to say.*

In contrast, certain participants reported that professional terminology often creates a common language between employees, which can alleviate problems for second language English speakers once they are familiar with all the terminology.

- *W7P3: ...it makes it a lot easier because we sort of have this common language of computer talk.*
- *W7P6: ...with work we all talk this common language of IT and technology, so you've already got this common point of reference so that people can understand what you are saying*

because they understand the language, so you don't necessarily have to have as good a grasp on vocabulary and sentence structure or whatever

- B2P10: *...with time, and you learn new things and you develop yourself, and you get to understand the terminology, the language and all the concepts, you tend to like it, you know.*

4.1.2.3. Sociolinguistic Sensitivity

Sociolinguistic sensitivity refers to a speaker's "awareness of and sensitivity to the contextual features of his utterance and his ability to modify his message in terms of this context" (Penn, 1998, pp. 184). In this study, indices of sociolinguistic sensitivity that were examined were greetings, listening skills and reaction to communication breakdown.

Yet again, there was a highly significant difference between ***the way in which participants rated their colleagues and the way in which participants rated themselves***. It can be seen from Table 17 and 18 that differences were significant in terms of ratings of appropriateness, $F_{(1,266)} = 43.756$; $P = .000$, and ratings of message interference, $F_{(1,266)} = 17.627$; $P = .000$. Once again, ***participants tended to rate their own sociolinguistic sensitivity more favourably than they rated their colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity.***

Table 17: Significance Levels between Participant Factors with regard to Ratings of Appropriateness (Sociolinguistic Sensitivity)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	.988	.374	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	4.009	.046	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	43.756	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	.544	.581	
FORM * RATING	2	1.641	.196	
RACE * RATING	1	18.701	.000	**
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	.362	.697	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Table 18: Significance Levels between Participant Factors with regard to Ratings of Message Interference (Sociolinguistic Sensitivity)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	2	.506	.604	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	9.498	.002	**
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	17.627	.000	**
FORM * RACE	2	.684	.506	
FORM * RATING	2	.790	.455	
RACE * RATING	1	23.432	.000	**
FORM * RACE * RATING	2	.069	.933	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Statistical analyses of variance revealed highly significant interactions between the factors of **race and rating** in terms of appropriateness, $F_{(1,266)} = 18.701$; $P = .000$, and message interference, $F_{(1,266)} = 23.432$; $P = .000$. Figures 10 and 11 display these interactions.

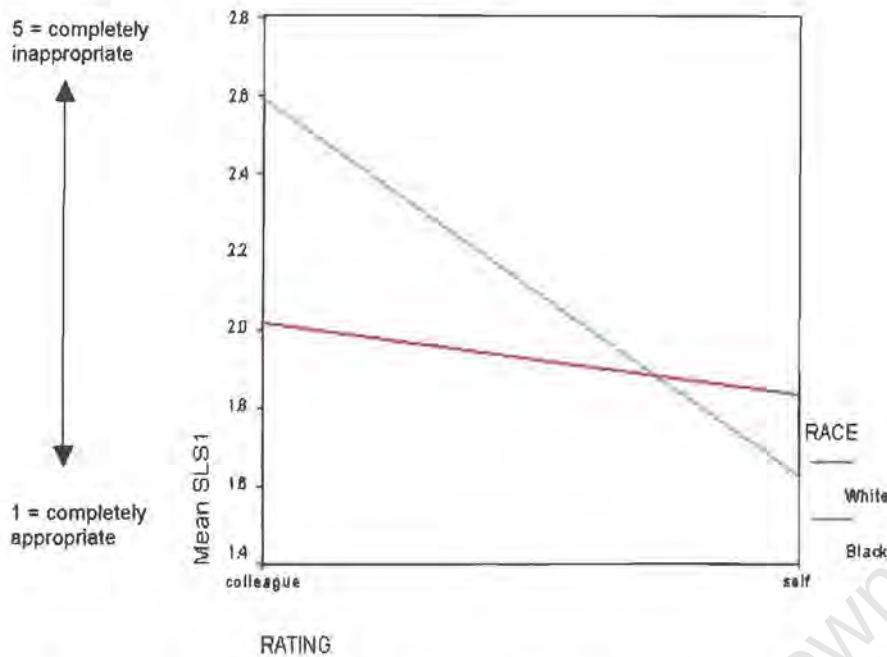


Figure 10: Ratings of Appropriateness(Sociolinguistic Sensitivity)

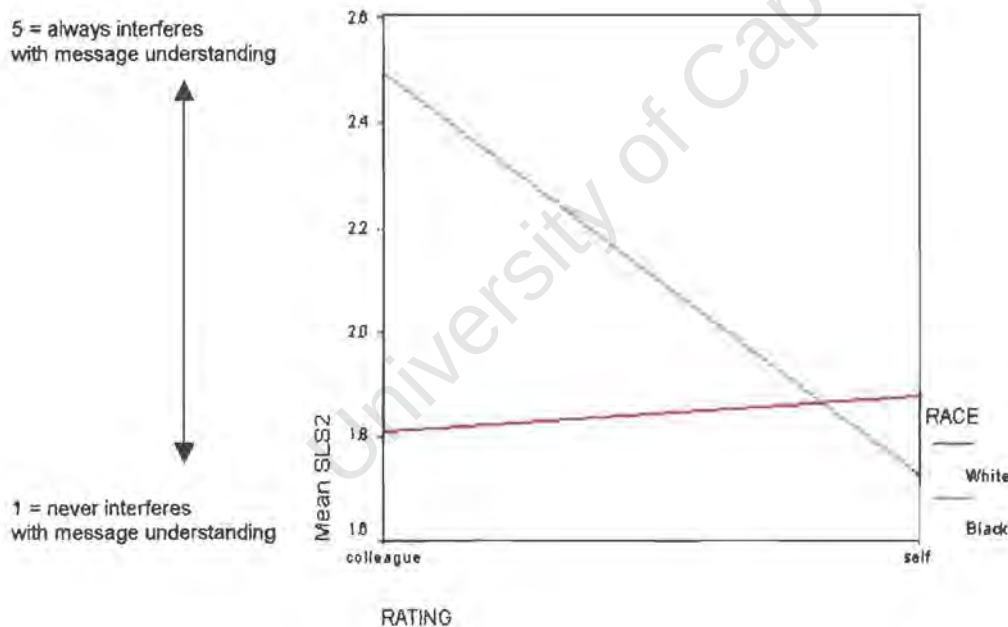


Figure 11: Ratings of Message Interference (Sociolinguistic Sensitivity)

Figure 10 and 11 reveal the following findings related to ratings of sociolinguistic sensitivity:

- White ratings of black colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity >⁵ black ratings of white colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity;

⁵ > = more appropriate and less message interference

- Black ratings of own sociolinguistic sensitivity > white ratings of own sociolinguistic sensitivity. 7

These findings were very similar to those relating to control of semantic content. Once again, the findings from the interviews supported the results from the questionnaires. While numerous black participants indicated that many of their white colleagues have poor listening skills and react inappropriately to communication breakdown, many white participants felt that their black colleagues had good listening skills. It was found that black participants' average ratings of their white colleagues' sociolinguistic sensitivity fell into the 'least appropriate' and 'most message interference' categories for ratings of communication on the telephone, in a business meeting and on an informal basis. A number of white participants felt that sociolinguistic sensitivity was an area of communication that they needed to improve on themselves. Black participants generally indicated that they felt that their own listening skills are extremely good and felt that it was one of their communicative strengths.

Further support is provided for this from the questionnaires with regard to ratings of sociolinguistic sensitivity across different communicative situations. ***Black participants' average ratings of their own sociolinguistic sensitivity fell into the 'most appropriate' and 'least message interference' categories for ratings of communication on the telephone, in a business meeting and on an informal basis.*** The details of the findings from the interviews are discussed below.

Van Jaarsveld (1998) cautions that serious misunderstandings can result if speakers are not aware of the difference in use and social functions of the opening routine in other's languages and cultures. Although seemingly insignificant to many participants, ***greetings*** convey respect and contribute to establishing friendship and harmony.

- *W4P9: The whole issue of blacks saying that whites don't greet - that's a very important thing in the black culture that you must greet other people because you are showing respect and so forth.*

Certain black participants reported that some of their white colleagues' greetings lack genuine interest, which confirms the suggestion by Adey and Andrew (1990) that greetings can sometimes become so stereotyped that they become meaningless or offensive.

- *B3P5: I'm the type of person who likes to engage people...sometimes I'll pop by his workstation and say, "Hey, my brother, how are you?" and he just greets me, you know, in that serious way, you know, "Go away." Um, I guess that's his personality, really, one cannot change that...but...for me, that is just being too serious.*
- *B8P5: Um, simplistically, you rarely get somebody when you say "how are you" in the morning, will say, "It's very bad"...it's always "ok"..."fine", "howzit?", "it's ok". And all sorts of things.*

The capacity to be non-judgmental is highlighted as a contributing factor to achieving effective communication (Ruben, 1977). A person's **listening skills** play an important role in this regard. Guffey (1991) notes that poor listening skills are costly in business, as it is a communication skill that is often taken for granted but affects many other aspects of communication, such as turn-taking and topic control. The majority of participants in this study highlighted listening skills as an extremely important communication skill. Colleagues with good listening skills were always viewed in a positive light.

- *W7P1: He's a good listener, he often sits back and he actually listens.*
- *B1P21: But what I like about him...his listening skills are very good.*

The responses obtained from participants who complained about their colleagues' poor listening skills supported Steyn's (1993) belief that people who feel that they have been listened to fully and attentively are generally more receptive to hearing reactions to their contribution, whether they be positive or negative.

- *B8P11: He's not a listener.*
- *B5P3: ...when you talk he already has the answers with him, so as a result of that he will already try to jump in and tell you how he thinks things should be done, whereas, maybe you were still in the process of...saying what he tells you back that you need to do. So that's his challenge...*

A number of participants, mostly white participants, felt that their own listening skills need improvement.

- *W5P5: I don't have a lot of patience, I don't obviously listen that well sometimes. So I hear what I want to hear and disregard the rest. Maybe my listening skills should be sharpened up a bit.*

- B5P6: *Listening skills...where I would be able to just sit down and listen and try to understand where the other person is coming from - I think that is where I have to improve most.*

A number of authors highlight the importance of **reaction to communication breakdown** during intercultural exchanges in business (Fielding, 1997; Rutter, 1996). By feigning understanding, messages may be interpreted inappropriately, inadequately and often in a completely opposite way to what the speaker intended. This in turn has the potential to create frustration and hostility between individuals of different cultures, particularly when the speaker realises that the listener did not understand him in the first place (Rutter, 1996). In this study, many black participants felt that their white colleagues' reaction to communication breakdown is inappropriate. Many indicated that their colleagues merely ignore the miscommunication and continue as if nothing is wrong.

- B2P9: *...people tend to ignore you when they don't understand what you are saying...*
- B2P2: *...sometimes you can see that the person really doesn't understand what you're saying...and you just end up "Ok, it's fine"...he rides over you...he rides over you, instead of thinking "What exactly are you saying?", you know? Sometimes I try to explain myself further, you know?*

4.1.2.4. Non-verbal Communication

The relationship between culture and non-verbal communication is well documented and the South African media has played a large role in exposing generalised cultural norms, particularly with regard to eye gaze, loudness of speech and body space (Steyn, 1993). In this study, the category of non-verbal communication was broken down into the sub-categories of haptics (physical contact), proxemics (body space) and kinesics (body posture, eye gaze, facial expression and gestures).

Table 19: Significance Levels between Participant Factors with regard to Ratings of Appropriateness (Non-verbal Communication)

SOURCE	df	F	SIG.	NOTES
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	1	.133	.716	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	.099	.754	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	14.551	.000	**
FORM * RACE	1	.029	.864	
FORM * RATING	1	.001	.974	
RACE * RATING	1	3.479	.064	
FORM * RACE * RATING	1	.141	.708	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

Table 20: Significance Levels between Participant Factors with regard to Ratings of Message Interference (Non-verbal Communication)

SOURCE	df	F	Sig.	Notes
FORM (i.e. telephone vs. business meeting vs. informal contact)	1	.315	.575	
RACE (i.e. black vs. white)	1	2.383	.124	
RATING (i.e. colleague vs. self)	1	.378	.540	
FORM * RACE	1	.082	.775	
FORM * RATING	1	.002	.964	
RACE * RATING	1	9.664	.002	**
FORM * RACE * RATING	1	.015	.903	
* significant $p < 0.05$		** significant $p < 0.01$		

As can be seen from Table 19, a significant difference was found between the **way in which participants rated their colleagues' non-verbal communication and the way in which participants rated their own non-verbal communication**. This difference was significant only in terms of ratings of appropriateness, $F_{(1,266)} = 14.551$; $P = .000$. Once again, participants' ratings of their **own non-verbal communication were generally more favourable than their ratings of their colleagues' non-verbal communication**.

In addition, Table 20 reveals that a highly significant interaction was found to exist between the factors of **race and rating**, $F_{(1,266)} = 9.664$; $P = .002$. This interaction only applied to ratings of message interference and is depicted in Figure 12 below.

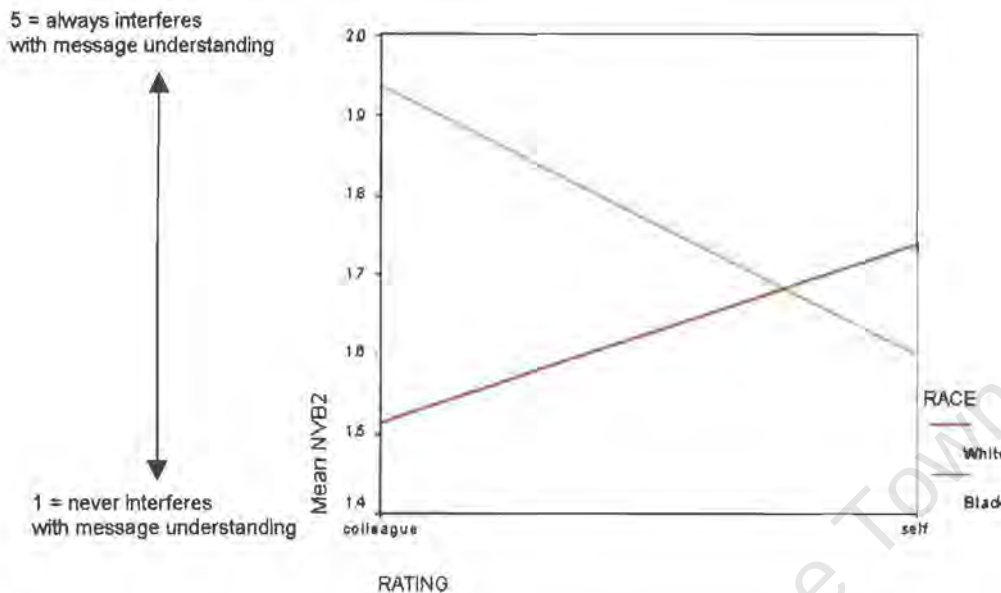


Figure 12: Ratings of Message Interference (Non-verbal Communication)

The following can be determined from Figure 12:

- White ratings of black colleagues' non-verbal communication > ⁶ black ratings of white colleagues' non-verbal communication;
- Black ratings of own non-verbal communication > white ratings of own non-verbal communication.
- Black ratings of self > black ratings of colleague
- White ratings of colleague > white ratings of self

These findings were not supported by data from the interviews. From discussions of specific aspects of non-verbal communication during the interviews, it became clear that many black employees are particularly sensitive about their own non-verbal communication and the perceptions that others have regarding this. However, results from questionnaires indicated that the black participants rated themselves better than the white participants rated themselves.

⁶ > = interferes less with message understanding

- *B1P3: ...obviously there are things that people are unaware of, you know, things like...non-verbal communication. Obviously I think people from African backgrounds... blacks...are generally viewed to be very bad with that one.*

In order to elaborate on these discrepancies, findings will be discussed in more detail under the sub-categories of non-verbal communication.

Proxemics (body space) and **haptics** (physical contact) are areas of non-verbal communication which are reportedly determined by an individual's gender, age and culture (Remland, Jones & Brinkman, 1995). Some black employees noted that they sometimes feel unsure of what is expected from them in terms of using non-verbal communication in the workplace. This confirms McDaniel and Anderson's (1998) suggestion that knowledge of how touch is used in intercultural interactions is particularly critical to effective communication. It also confirms the suggestion that people who come from different cultural backgrounds are less able to predict how their communication will turn out and find it more difficult to predict the other person's responses, all of which places a strain on the relationship (Fielding, 1997; Gass & Varonis, 1991).

- *B4P6: ...sometimes I'm not sure whether the kind of gestures, body space I give to people are appropriate because it depends from one person to another. The physical contact...a lot of people don't like that and the body space, they tend to distance themselves. Sometimes I think for communication to be effective people need to be thrown together, for people to be more comfortable with one another there should be physical contact, you know what I'm saying, yeah?*

Kinesics refers to body movements contributing to communication (Fiske, 1990). In this study, these movements include body posture, eye gaze (sometimes referred to as oculusics), facial expressions and gestures.

Body posture refers to the way in which an individual sits, stands, or lies during communication (Fiske, 1990). From the results of this study, body posture does not appear to cause major difficulties or misunderstanding in the workplace for these participants. It appears that both black and white employees often use body posture to indicate that they are attentive and listening to an interlocutor. This confirms literature which suggests that body posture can convey a limited, but interesting range of meanings, which are often concerned with interpersonal attitudes, such as friendliness, hostility, superiority or inferiority (Argyle, 1982; Fiske, 1990; McDaniel & Anderson, 1998).

- *W6P11: He's always very attentive, just his posture as well, he always tries to step forward and listen to just what you saying, um and takes notes and things like that so it appears as though he's listening and when he asks questions they're always appropriate and I think to the point, he doesn't ramble too much.*
- *B1P17: It makes you pay attention, because like if you're sitting down, the way he does it (unintelligible because laughing and talking) sometimes you laugh at him...if you are sitting down and you are then to turn slightly and if you're sitting in a mobile chair, I mean a chair with wheels, he makes sure that comes to your side and if I (unintelligible) he goes with you (laughing).*

In terms of **eye gaze**, messages conveyed by eye gaze usually depend on when, how often, and for how long individuals allow their eyes to meet. Culture frequently modifies how much eye contact individuals may engage in and with whom (e.g. Argyle, 1991; Fiske, 1991; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). Certain cultures have special rules about eye gaze, such as not looking at certain people or certain parts of a person's body. A number of researchers, including Van Jaarsveld (1998), have found that direct eye contact in conversation is considered offensive by African language speakers in South Africa. The findings of this study support that those of Van Jaarsveld (1998), Argyle (1991), Fiske (1991), Kashcula and Anthonissen (1995).

- *B6P7: When you're talking to an African person they might not look you straight in the eye, it's not because they've got something to hide, it's not because they've stolen something, it's a culture...you don't look an older person eye-to-eye unless it's someone who's your contemporary.*
- *B1P27: ...there might be things...if I'm not looking at you on the eyes and...if you feel uncomfortable or you feel offended by that you should ask yourself...do I know why this person is doing these things? Because you need to appreciate that it's there. I'm not saying that I'm going to stare at that picture over there...an hour and thirty minutes that's all I'm doing, you know...but it might be that 50% of the time I'm looking at you, 50% I'm not...because it's just that when I'm speaking to a person, I'm not used to like looking at them in the eye right through...*

Black participants reported that although the relationship between culture and eye gaze has been discussed repeatedly in the media and academic world, many white employees

are still unaware of the nature and meanings behind the differences. This suggestion was confirmed by the comments made by white participants in the interviews.

- B4P3:

B: ...as you know, from an African black perspective, it's difficult to maintain eye contact...it was different when I started working and...what made it more difficult and different was...there's been ongoing debate, especially from the employment equity point of view that eye contact shouldn't be used as a selection tool, you know, because of cultural differences and...I've never really put it high on my priority list to say I want to work on eye contact because I knew that the cultural, the debate around whether it need to be used in the work situation or not.

R: So you assume people are now aware of the differences?

B: No, I don't think they are aware. The majority of them are still not aware.

- W6P2: *I think eye contact is one [problem], where people tend not to look at you.*

It seems that the issue of conforming to Western norms regarding the use of eye gaze is a dilemma that many black employees face as many realize the lack of awareness and sensitivity in the workplace surrounding this issue. It appears that this results in much pressure on the employees and increases frustration levels.

- B1P6:

B: ...when I'm not looking, you know sometimes...I found this...that if I don't look at a person...they would...I think deliberately sometimes...ask me to repeat myself. Because as I'm not paying enough attention. That I don't accept.

R: Why do you feel they ask u that? Because they think you're not paying attention?

B: Ja, therefore I'm not professional. I'm not paying attention, I'm not looking them in the eye...I try to look people in the eye but I don't like people looking at a person's eye, I mean I didn't grew up, I didn't grew up doing that...you know, for more than a minute looking at somebody...it's just too much, man.

- B1P3: *...especially the eye contact...the black person doesn't look...especially if you're older, you're not supposed to look in the eye...because that's disrespect. Where as in the white culture...if you don't, then you're not interested, right? Or you're not paying attention. So there're those things. How do I rate myself? ...I tend to rate myself...based on what the perceptions are of the business world. But I (laughs)...it's a flexibility issue, you know when I speak to somebody I know...you use this thing differently...if I'm speaking to a black person it's no big deal...but if I speak to a white person I know it...might be a big deal...*

With regard to **facial expression**, which has been noted as the most important source of non-verbal communication (Argyle, 1982), black participants noted a tendency for white colleagues to adopt an expressionless facial stare or 'poker face', particularly in meetings. Those who referred to this tendency found it inappropriate and disconcerting at times as it makes it difficult to gauge a person's thoughts and responses to what one is saying.

- *B4P5:*

B: Uh, I think he's sometimes making one expression, whether something is serious or not serious, whether the point is important or not, you know. I think it might be because maybe he relies more on his voice to do that, ja sometimes it's difficult to tell whether the expression is trying to emphasise a point or not.

R: And culturally, is that quite an important thing – facial expression?

B: No, it's not that important.

Fiske (1990) suggests that **gestures** share a close relationship with language and often serve to supplement verbal communication. Certain cultures use more gestures than others and some gestures are interpreted completely differently between cultures. In this study, a number of participants chose their colleagues' gestures as one of their strongest communication skills as they felt that it facilitates understanding.

- *W1P3: I would say uh...gestures uh...he explains something with his hands...*

Black participants discussed the relationship between gesture and culture and noted that the extensive use of gesture is not characteristic of African cultures, as this is considered to be disrespectful and patronising as it is indicative of non-verbal communication used with young children.

- *B7P9: ...using your hands with people, apparently you do it with children as well, a lot of adults are doing things with children, trying to explain things to them and a lot of black adults will feel that you are telling them they are stupid...when you use your hands a lot...*

Thus, when it came to self-evaluation, black participants who use a lot of gesture in the workplace felt that gesture was one of their weakest communication skills.

- *B5P7: ...when I talk and using my hands people will think that I'm a little bit angry whereas that is how I talk...every now and then...that's how I express myself. Other people would confess after a long time, that "Hey, we thought you were a bully and all that, but we can see now that you are just the way you are."*

- *B7P7: Everytime I talk, specially for the past 2 weeks, I'm aware, cos someone told me to be, I'm aware that my hand moves a lot. I'm told that my hand is all over the place when I talk...I find it inappropriate. I like my hands to move as little as possible when I talk. I think people pay more attention to what I'm saying the less my hands are moving...Distractable and depending on how I do it, it can be intimidating, irritating. Could be a whole lot of things.*

Handshake is a specific aspect of gesture that is often overlooked in communication. Jaspers and Hewstone (1982) suggest that the use of handshake in intercultural exchanges often results in miscommunication and discomfort, as it involves a number of complexities that often give rise to inaccurate interpretations of communicative intentions. Unlike the finding in Brewis' (1999) study, in this study the participants did not seem to find it particularly inappropriate or problematic and participants tended to dismiss the suggestion that it could carry deeper meaning about a person.

- *B1P5:*

B: Somebody says sometimes that the handshake means something. You know if it's strong, it means you are, you are...um, I don't know. Maybe I'm not using the right example but I'm saying, you know, that if your handshake is not as strong then you...you are not confident. I don't know whether handshake does really mean that. I try to make it strong but I don't want to squeeze somebody's hand (laughs). There's a thin line...that's what it's supposed to mean. You know, to me those things don't mean anything, you know. It's just to meet a person and that's what it is...and it ends there.

R: You don't feel it conveys...

B: Nah. Ja no, 1st impression. I subscribe to that, but I don't think really I have to go out of my way to practise... [indicates handshake] (laughs)...how to shake somebody's hand (laughs).

4.1.3. Summary of Findings: Linguistic Aspects

The following section provides a brief summary of the findings of the study sample's perceptions of linguistic aspects of intercultural communication within this organisation.

Overall, participants expressed satisfaction with their colleagues' and their own communication in the workplace. A general trend was for participants to rate themselves better than their colleagues. The only exceptions were when:

- ♦ White participants indicated that their own non-verbal communication interferes with message understanding more often than their black colleagues' non-verbal communication.

- ♦ White participants indicated that their own sociolinguistic sensitivity interferes with message understanding more often than their black colleagues' non-verbal communication.

Ratings by black participants revealed no exceptions in this regard – they always rated their own communication skills better than their colleagues' communication skills. As discussed in a Chapter 3, self-knowledge induces attitudes that facilitate good intercultural behaviour (Steyn, 1994). It is felt by the researcher that the findings of this study reveal that employees are perhaps not fully aware of the areas of their own communication which cause difficulties during intercultural exchanges in the workplace.

Black participants always rated white colleagues poorer than white participants rated black colleagues, except for ratings of vocal aspects. Ratings of vocal aspects were generally rated poorly by both groups across situations. White participants' ratings of black colleagues were particularly low on the telephone.

In terms of ratings of control of semantic content, all participants highlighted the importance of good coherence, topic control and turn taking, particularly in more formal settings in the workplace. Numerous black participants discussed the influence that language proficiency has control of semantic content and indicated that there is a lack of sensitivity on the part of their white colleagues regarding the dilemmas facing second language speakers in a multicultural workplace.

Sociolinguistic sensitivity of white colleagues was always rated poorly by black participants and sometimes by white participants themselves. This suggests that consideration for the speaker is not being displayed enough between black and white colleagues in South Africa. In contrast to this, black employees' sociolinguistic sensitivity was always rated high by black participants and was usually supported by ratings of white participants.

The findings regarding non-verbal communication contradicted the literature which suggests that the numerous cultural differences in non-verbal communication increase the risk of communication breakdown and misinterpretation during intercultural exchanges (see Fielding, 1997; Fiske, 1990; Mammam, 1995; Steyn, 1996). White employees do not seem to find black colleagues' non-verbal communication inappropriate or interfering with message understanding, and vice versa. An interesting finding was that white participants rated their own non-verbal communication fairly poorly across the three

situations. The reasons for this are unclear and participants did not substantiate these ratings of their own non-verbal communication during the interviews.

In the following section, findings related to the South African context of intercultural communication in business organisations will be presented and discussed.

University of Cape Town

4.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

"There is always both a personal as well as a cultural dimension in every intercultural encounter, and both are significant." (Steyn, 1994a, pp. 18)

It was clear from the interviews that the individual psychological attributes of participants strongly affects perceptions of communication abilities. According to Mammam (1995), it is necessary to always take employees' 'psychological predispositions' into account in order to appreciate how intercultural effectiveness can be achieved in a multicultural work setting.

Employees' psychological backgrounds relate to certain **cognitive, behavioural, attitudinal and personality factors**. Thus, in terms of psychological factors, achieving intercultural effectiveness in a multicultural workplace depends on:

- ♦ the way in which employees acquire and use knowledge in their daily interactions (cognitive dimension)
- ♦ their ability to establish interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively (behavioural dimension)
- ♦ their general attitude and personality.

These psychological factors are influenced by numerous organisational factors as well as certain sociobiological factors, including culture, age, country of origin, educational/professional attainment and religion (Mammam, 1995).

Participants in this study raised a number of issues that can be related to one or more of these psychological factors.

Numerous white participants indicated a need for their black colleagues to be less **submissive** and **more assertive** in certain situations in the workplace.

- *W3P4: I think he could be more expressive...when something grates you...get it out...sometimes I just get the impression that he's maybe a little bit more reserved than I would have been in the situation, but it's hard for me to say at this stage how much he is deliberately holding back.*

A number of the black participants acknowledged that they often tend to adopt a submissive approach to communication in the workplace, particularly in business meetings. It is suggested that this is influenced by a combination of organisational and

sociobiological factors. Three major issues that appear to impact on the extent of submissive behaviour are:

- ♦ The nature of the corporate environment and organisation
- ♦ Language proficiency
- ♦ Cultural influences

For many black participants, the nature of the corporate environment and this organisation's culture are factors that have played an important role in determining their disposition at work. For many, the process of adapting to this environment has been extremely difficult and has often been accompanied by feelings of intimidation, anxiety and isolation. The process is particularly difficult for those black employees who have not had a great deal of exposure to the white culture in the past.

- *B4P6: In a group situation I tend to be...a bit reserved, ja, because at times [the organisation's] environment can be quite intimidating, especially when you are new, you know. Everyone talking...and you sometimes feel intimidated and I tend to...take a back seat and...speak as...as little as possible.*
- *B7P12: If I go to a room in a meeting and I'm the only black person, I won't feel...I will feel uncomfortable to a certain extent, but I won't feel that uncomfortable because there were many classes in high school in which I was the only black person. Now someone who's not used to that will not adapt to...feels very intimidated. The kind who tends to be the person who ends up not invited to meetings because they say he hardly ever says anything, he's got nothing to contribute...whereas he might have a lot to contribute, he's just thereby very intimidated.*

As mentioned earlier, participants' proficiency in the *lingua franca* of the organisation has a prominent influence on their business communication. A number of black participants indicated that they tend to take a back seat in communication when they are struggling to keep up with the pace of conversation, particularly in a business meeting.

- *B2P5: Because they are so fluent, they are able to cut at any point, at any rate. And for us it takes quite a while...and people have to stop and listen to what you say.*

There are distinct cultural differences related to submissiveness in South Africa (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995). A number of black participants described how their cultural background affects how they interact with people who are older or of higher status than

themselves. Due to cultural differences in the workplace, some black participants find that they have to act against cultural values and norms in order to be heard in the workplace.

- B2P9: *...in my culture, if someone old speaks, I don't speak. I wait until I'm given a chance. But in the white culture, they just communicate like that. So in a way, when it gets to the work environment, that actually affects you. Cos they are not used to communicate interact with someone when that person is speaking...we tend to be silent...and we end up not saying anything, not because you want to, but because the situation itself, the environment doesn't allow you to break in.*

Many black participants reported an awareness of inaccurate and predominantly negative perceptions by other cultures surrounding the issue of submissiveness in the workplace.

- B7P11: *I think a lot of white managers...are seeing their black employees as maybe submissive and shy people when they are not really seeing themselves as shy. They're seeing the standard when talking to an adult...as they would relate to it in a black situation...the way you treat adults in the black culture and the way you treat adults in the white culture...two different things.*

However, it does appear that many white employees are aware of cultural differences regarding submissiveness in the workplace.

- W7P7: *He'll share, but you know sometimes he's a bit quiet...Because someone's quiet doesn't mean that they've got nothing to say...if culturally they are just more predisposed to being quiet and thinking a little bit more about, before they say something...there's an assumption that's made if someone's quiet, then, you know, they're not good at what they do or they don't know what they're on about and, you know...*

It appears that while many white participants feel that the corporate environment demands that one is direct and sometimes confrontational during business communication, numerous black participants indicated that there is still a need for **greater transparency** to be displayed by their white colleagues.

- W8P6: *Um...(long pause). If I'm passionate about something then I will stand up and say it*
- W2P3: *... I just say my piece, as it is, you know. I don't beat around the bush. ...*

- *W1P11: I don't hesitate when I need to say something, I will say it. And sometimes, yes, I'm a bit undiplomatic, that's perhaps negative to it, although these days I say often "It's just my opinion, if you don't like something...." I used to just say uh, "I don't like it". Now I say, "Hey, I don't like it, but it's just my opinion."...*

It seems that this need for increased openness and transparency to be displayed by white colleagues is related to discussions of more sensitive and controversial topics, such as cultural, racial and political issues. White colleagues who are willing to talk about controversial and sensitive subjects frankly and openly were viewed in a positive light by the black participants.

- *B8P5: nobody...really sits down and appreciates those differences...and explores. I think... that's the integral part...my worry is that people are scared to talk about them openly...because...people are afraid to offend somebody.*
- *B8P6: ...people should learn to talk about things openly. Um...if I do something wrong...and I go and claim...that I am being reprimanded because I am black or something like that...can I put facts to that statement? Ok, can I say ok, another white colleague of mine has done exactly the same a, b, c and d which is exactly the same and didn't get reprimanded and why? Because those are some of the things that sometimes fly around...because we don't want to... um discuss these things openly.*
- *B8P12: ...the thing that I enjoy most with him...is he challenges you. On a lot of things. We do talk um, socially, politics, work, whatever...he brings things to the table...in whatever you're talking about. And... he's the kind of person who you disagree [with] now...on a very hot debate...and two minutes down the line...you forget. He can easily...distinguish that ok, we don't fight, that was work...*
- *B8P16: ...if there's a problem, let's just talk, because tomorrow I'm coming, the next day I'm coming so you will bottle it up and you will explode sitting there because I'll be coming and you have this problem and you never sort it out...you go on the weekend, you watch rugby...you are seeing some black fumbling there...and when you come into the work you see you are talking about it..."they shouldn't have put who who in" and now you stop talking about it because you think..."Ah, come on you guys, I'm ok! The boy fumbled, it's true, let's talk about it!" So those are some of the nitty gritty things that...that comes. And you don't talk about it.*

Black participants reported that many colleagues are overly sensitive to being "politically correct" and as a result, do not discuss certain issues for fear of offending other employees.

- *B8P17: ...we have lots of Muslim people within [this organisation], because it's Cape Town...but...how many times...have you found...people of different races, denominations ...talking about the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban, or Osama Bin Laden within their teams? You don't see those things, because people feel like they will be offending their Muslim brothers or sisters. But probably, if they are talking about it in your face, you will understand it, probably you will appreciate more, or...you'll get something out of that.*
- *B3P9: You see, my problem is, people like to be politically correct...and as a result they don't express themselves. When they find someone who expresses themselves, they turn him into a villain. I was turned into villain because I questioned, I'm that type of person...and unfortunately, if we carry on like that we won't grow. We won't be able to see the other side of people...I think we need to chat more, and we need to...come out honestly and say I don't agree with you...and this is blah blah blah why I don't like you.*

A number of white participants expressed feelings of irritation towards black colleagues who discuss politics, both past and present, in the workplace. Many black participants revealed an awareness of this and felt that this conveys a lack of consideration and sensitivity on the part of their white colleagues. It was felt by some black participants that this may be due to their white colleagues' fear of acknowledging the past and dealing with differing political points of view.

- *W8P8: ...some years back we had a...young black chap who...worked for me...I didn't have a problem with him cos you know, I stripped out the political situation altogether...and focused on the productivity um...and delivery or...good quality and...after that it was fine.*
- *W2P4: ...my biggest problem is when somebody is always anti...brings back the past and that's their life...is because the whites treated them like that. That's where you just don't communicate with a person anymore...*
- *B5P5: He's the first one...we drove one time to a meeting and he brought up these...they came from his side...it was especially the politics of the Western Cape and he started chatting chatting chatting. When I got in and I started talking he just said "ahhhhhh politics are not for me" so that was his way of pushing out of the topic.*

One white participant indicated an appreciation for the need to openly discuss politics in the workplace as politics and economics are closely interrelated and hence have a direct impact on their own daily business practice.

- *W8P4: Politics, economics, ...um, I think that we're a fairly unique area in the sense that, you know...um...being focused on the investment side of the business, economics comes into play a lot. Um, so really, I mean it's an appreciation of what the political situation means...on the economic environment.*

These findings support Thomas' (1996) belief that "when all the politically correct corporate-speak is debunked, it appears that, while political freedom has eventually come to South Africa, generally, in the industrial and commercial sectors it's still business as usual" (pp. 1).

The issue of transparency is in turn closely linked to **conflict management** in the workplace. This subject was raised on a number of occasions and revealed numerous differing opinions. Conflict plays a significant role in how people understand and play out their organisational lives (Pepper, 1995). It is, in and of itself, neither good nor bad. Rather, the way that conflict is managed can lead to either positive or negative outcomes. Some of the positive effects of conflict include increased stimulation among workers, better ideas and idea generation, recognition of flaws in the system, and adjustment of the balance of power. Some of the negative consequences include destroyed relationships, hurt feelings, anger, frustration and resentment, as well as physical illness from stress.

A few white participants suggested that a person tends to be more confrontational when they are knowledgeable on a subject:

- *W8P2: I think just on the HR related issues...um...he feels very passionate about them...he's also learnt them...at varsity...ah, so he has the benefit of that theoretical knowledge to brings to the table...um, which is not necessarily our area of expertise. And he will also challenge...based upon his theoretical understanding.*

A number of black participants indicated a need for conflict to be dealt with in a more open and direct manner in the workplace. Some black participants reported that some white colleagues perceive them to be overly aggressive when they attempt to do this in the workplace.

- *B3P9: When we're in a meeting, when you are a team, I don't expect us to agree on all issues. Most issues we don't agree on, let's put them on the table and let's agree to disagree. And*

unfortunately, people want...things to be plain sailing...when you question them they feel...whew! this guy is too radical for the establishment.

It is proposed that an interesting relationship might exist between white participants' perceptions of their black colleagues' submissiveness and black participants' perceptions of their white colleagues' lack of transparency. Is it possible that black participants' perceptions that white colleagues are lacking in transparency is another factor that increases black submissiveness in the workplace?

Lastly, it appears that the role that **humour** plays in intercultural exchanges in the workplace is multifaceted.

On the one hand, humour is often used by people in a multicultural setting to help them deal with cultural differences and sensitive issues. As was noted in Steyn and Van Zyl's (2001) study, many participants in this study recognised the value of laughing together in creating bonds between people.

- *B2P8: ... we are so close, I mean, there is no problem of interaction and colour, or anything like that. We even make fun out of it. Everytime I say, "The black man is here" and another thing, "Why are you doing this? Are you doing it because I'm black?" you know. It has become more of a joke than a concern...you know we make so much fun of it and it creates such a family...*
- *W8P5: ...if one looks at...our area...it is reasonably diverse and....uh, we have an Afrikaans speaking chap in our area, also comes from a very strong Afrikaans background...and went to the Army and...all that sort of thing....and B8 and him get on very very well....uh...it's... actually quite amazing how...they take the mickey out of each other. It's not one-sided.*

Humour, on the other hand, is distinctly culture-bound and can be used as a subtle tool of inclusion and exclusion. The use of humour between colleagues from different cultures sometimes increases the risk of communication breakdown. Besides the fact that humour is culture-bound, it does appear that language proficiency plays an important role as jokes require an understanding of higher levels or subtleties in language. (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001)

- *B4P1: ...we're from different cultural backgrounds and I tend to lose him...there are the kind of jokes he sometimes shares with me. At times I don't find them humorous... The same will*

apply with me...sometimes I share things with him and he doesn't really understand. Maybe because of where we come from...we're quite different.

In addition, it appears that one's length of employment and familiarity with other employees are factors which are always considered when determining whether one will use humour in the organisation. While humour is a tool that can be used to create bonds between employees of different cultures, it can also be offensive when it is not understood. The question with humour always is "who's laughing?" (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001. pp. 41).

- *B8P13: ...many times I tend to be very 'jokular'...in my approach. Where I joke around a lot if I get into the nitty gritty's. Um, it's your weak point at first because people don't know you. So when you...you joke, you have to assess the environment first...because you might end up upsetting other people.*

In section 4.3. the results of the study are discussed in terms of the South African context and the resultant influences that these exert on intercultural communication between South Africans in the workplace today.

4.3. SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The results from the interviews confirm Hall's (1995) suggestion that there are number of prominent external factors that act as barriers or obstacles to achieving effective intercultural communication in South African organisations. This study revealed that the challenges created by South Africa's history, as well as its multilingual and multicultural society, are multifaceted.

According to Human (1996), the presentation of cultures in terms of stereotypes is extremely problematic in South Africa as the country's history of apartheid has created or reinforced an 'us' and 'them' phenomenon, where black culture is considered inferior and inappropriate in the South African business world.

It became clear through the interviews that the consequences of **South Africa's history of segregation and apartheid** is reflected in this particular South African organisation. In this study, a number of black employees' expressed extreme frustration and resentment towards those white colleagues who make stereotypical assumptions and possess misconceptions about people from other cultures. In addition, numerous black participants reported an awareness of stereotypes and misconceptions held by white colleagues within the organisation. Furthermore, many appeared to have developed a tolerance toward these views held by others.

- *B8P1: the person who was supposed to have showed me the ropes didn't even know...what [I did] at school, because...he...thinks, ok if you are...black, there is no black person who can come with higher qualifications. Later about 6 or 7 months ok we were in Durban and he asked where did you go to school? Really? And what did you do? I said I did a BSc Mathematics. Oh! Mathematics! And those sort of things. You can either tend to wonder, "Ok what do you think of me?" or you can be probably wiser and say ok, I expected that (within yourself) and treat it as that. And then we went further than that and he realised that I was finishing my MBA...he started to feel like a bit scared. Is he the right person to manage me? Ok...and then from there you are breaking those barriers, he started respecting me...*

Probably the most formidable challenge currently facing South Africa's democratic government is **education** (James & Lever, 2001; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001). A more equitable and better-performing system had to be created out of a desperately unequal, segregated, and inferior legacy (James & Lever, 2001). Although matters have improved greatly and access to schooling for black children has jumped beyond expectations, extreme differences exist between the educational qualifications of adults from various

cultural groups in South Africa today. The results of this study suggest that black employees who come from more privileged educational backgrounds are accepted more readily by their white colleagues. It is suggested that this is probably due to higher educational standards and the use of English as a first language in private schools. Thus, many white participants in this study felt that their black colleagues who had attended private and Model C schools possess linguistic qualities which are more appropriate and more acceptable in the corporate world.

- *W7P1: ...he went to UCT, did Business Science, so he speaks English very well. Very professional about it... I mean he's...he's a lot more eloquent... his understanding of English and the nuances and subtleties of the language, you know. But, you know, he went to a private school, studied at UCT, um...you'll probably find the English, you know, he talks a lot of the time - I'm guessing now...I think he's above average. I mean, his understanding of English is a lot better than a lot of the Afrikaans speaking guys. He understands the subtleties of language and he can pick up on the subtleties.*
- *W6P7: As I said I think [this organisation's] staff are very well educated in general...when you do get to chat to people I think it's normally fairly high level...and I think it's normally appropriate.*

However, some participants, both black and white, felt that black employees with such high qualifications are often not utilised to their maximum potential.

- *W8P10: I don't think guys sat up and took note of the fact...he was an MBA student...um, MBA generally tend to do...um...things slightly differently as well as study sort of other areas...outside our typical area of training...which is accounting and auditing...with the result that I think he probably felt that um...he wasn't being utilised to his fullest potential.*

As noted by Steyn and Van Zyl (2001), there is a growing rift between more elite, Anglicised young black people, "who are able to display familiarity with the signifiers of the norm" (pp. 40), and those whose background is more from township or rural life. Some black participants felt that attending private or Model C schools could sometimes results in black people "over conforming" to the dominant culture. This was found to be unacceptable by some black participants who felt that one's culture should still be preserved even when one is required to work alongside a dominant culture.

- *B1P11: ...there is a problem...most black people have, especially the youngsters who are just coming out of varsity, who had the liberty or had the opportunities like going to Model C*

schools which I never went to, aspire to be seen to (long pause) be (sigh), how do I put it? They aspire to be seen to conform better with the white culture...which is a problem...it's killing the other cultures. And it's something that is making life difficult...what I've seen is that most white colleagues that I've worked with don't necessarily get impressed by people like those. Actually I haven't seen one person who has actually been impressed with somebody...a black person who acts like, you know, changes accent, who changes everything, behaviours like non South African a non-African...actually I feel joy out of it...I feel joy, because I hate people who deny who they are...and I enjoy it when somebody doesn't want people to changefor stupid reasons.

- *B7P11: Ninety percent of my friends – black, from the township, they haven't been to private schools. The first time they had to speak to a white person was their first year varsity. So the way I speak to a white person and the way they speak to a white person, is totally totally different, because they still see a white person at a very different angle from the way I see it...*

In this study, black participants who had attended “white schools” suggested that, in the corporate world, they are at an advantage to their black colleagues who attended “black schools”. They felt that this is due to the fact that they have had more exposure to cultural norms of white people and have therefore been able to apply this knowledge to the workplace in order to adapt more easily to the corporate environment.

- *B7P11: Better understanding and it's also an advantage, ja. Definitely, much much better understanding...and it's easier to relate to as well because...I know a lot of my friends who're still afraid to say some things to white friends because they think they're going to think something that's probably out of the question.*

Similarly, a number of white participants who had been exposed to black people and who had had black friends as children, remarked that this had put them at an advantage with respect to intercultural relations in the workplace.

- *W8P9: I think I'm possibly in....in a better situation than most people...um, in the sense that I actually grew up uh....my very first friends were blacks...so from that point of view, I mean you know it's ...I don't have a problem, um...a person can be pink, blue or yellow, you know it's...it depends on the individual themselves.*

It was also mentioned by a black participant that many of his black friends' first interactions with white people had been in the workplace and that this had definitely put them at a disadvantage when trying to adapt to the corporate world. These findings

suggest that the current move towards greater integration in educational facilities will hopefully have a positive impact in the corporate world in terms of improved intercultural communication effectiveness.

In this study, it appears that some black and white employees are aware that numerous differences exist between employees of different cultural groups and are aware that there is a strong relationship between **culture and communication**.

- *W5P7: I just think there is a definite divide between the whites and the so-called "black people". The whites have their culture...and the blacks have their culture. Look, it's definitely better than it used to be, but there is still that divide...Guys are starting to learn to understand each other and how different ethnic groups work.*
- *B7P9: ...specifically between the two races, black and white, they communicate and talk differently.*

As Hall (1994) noted, the findings of this study suggest that cultural differences pose a serious obstacle to the development of mutual understanding as well as to ensuring effective communication within South African organisations. In Hall's (1994) study, it was found that there was a lack of willingness, as well as ability, to communicate and interpret information across cultures and felt that white employees' lack of knowledge regarding other cultures as well as the inability of most whites to communicate in a black language aggravated the situation. Although appreciation for different cultures was expressed by some participants in this study, the majority of the black participants and some of the white participants felt that there is generally a lack of awareness of cultural tendencies and differences by white colleagues in this organisation.

- *W4P9: I think there is a lack of understanding culture between people.*
- *B6P7: ...sometimes it becomes difficult for...white people I come across to speak effectively and sometimes you can just see their non-verbal communication, they're not understanding the way you're communicating...um...so I think it would just put everybody at ease. And if you are talking...communicating with somebody and you see they are completely not at ease, it also makes you uneasy...*

Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995) believe that interlocutors who are communicating across cultures through the use of *lingua franca* may become prejudiced against one

another if they are intolerant or ignorant of the communicative rules that apply in each other's mother tongue. The rules which pertain to each of the speaker's languages are often transferred into the *lingua franca*. Such differences may lead to misunderstanding and unwarranted prejudice against one another (Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995). The findings from the interviews suggest that linguistic prejudice and communication breakdown does result in this organisation as a result of problems with language proficiency. The details of these findings have already been discussed in Section 3.1.3.2.

In the following section, findings of the study related to the context of the organisation's history, culture and everyday organisational climate will be presented and discussed.

University of Cape Town

4.4. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Mammam (1995) suggests that in addition to the influence of various psychological and sociobiological factors, certain organisational factors such as structure, systems and policies impact on employees' intercultural effectiveness in a multicultural workplace. A number of organisational factors were discussed by the participants in this study. In particular, issues surrounding employment equity, adaptation to the corporate culture and organisational climate, as well as organisational support and training were raised.

4.4.1. Organisational History and Culture

As mentioned in the methodology, the researcher conducted interviews with a number of the company's senior management executives in order to obtain further information about this organisation's history and culture.

Following these interviews, it became clear that over the past few years this company has undergone much transformation in itself. This has been in relation to internal and external factors. Internal organisational restructuring as well as reconstruction of the organisation's mission, vision and values have been undertaken. In addition, the company has responded to broader transformation processes relating to the New South Africa.

Due to these changes and new challenges facing the organisation, senior management reported that much anxiety and confusion were demonstrated by employees. This was exacerbated by poor communication within the organisation. As was reported, the organisation's leadership team had been fairly "invisible" to the majority of employees and did not have a significant strategic context within the company. Thus, many perceived those in senior management positions to be disinterested in the well-being of the employees.

In the past numerous subcultures existed across the various business units within the organisation. Although many changes have occurred over the past few years, these subcultures are still apparent across various business units.

More recently, the organisation has implemented a large scale campaign in an attempt to address the challenges facing the company and revitalise the organisation's culture and business strategy. Since 2000 extensive ongoing communication exercises have been implemented to ensure total employee commitment and engagement in the process.

Below is a list of some of the training projects linked to employment equity and cultural diversity that are currently underway as part of the current campaign to revitalise the organisation's culture and repair the psychological contract between employees:

- **“Roadshows”**: During 2001 and the beginning of 2002, members of the organisation's senior management team initiated and facilitated informal discussions with managers in each region in South Africa which aimed to address managers' perceptions surrounding employment equity in the organisation. More specifically, these sessions aimed to alleviate fears to reduce resistance towards employment equity.
- **Organisation's Corporate University or Business School**: This school is committed to ongoing training and development of employees. It offers training around transformation in two workshop modules. These modules are entitled “Employment Equity: Creating an Optimum Mix of Skills” and “Optimising Diversity: Working with Difference”. Reports are compiled after each of these workshops to record what issues were raised and discussed by participants and are then summarised and sent to delegates as well as to the Employment Equity Manager of the organisation. Once every three months these reports are summarized and forwarded to business unit employment equity drivers. Questions raised in the workshops are answered in a summary report and is provided to delegates once every three months. This allows for the sharing of information regarding the issues raised, as well as keeping the debate active.
- **“Breakfast Sessions”**: These are held every second month with Business Unit Employment Equity Drivers and Business Unit Consultation Committees. Every session has a theme and presentations centre around this theme. Discussion time is facilitated in such a way as to highlight contributing (positive and negative) factors and develop company guidelines around each theme.
- **“Diversity Days”**: held at the organisation to celebrate diversity and raise and discuss issues surrounding employment equity and diversity.

4.4.2. Employment Equity

Employment equity refers to a practice within an organisation whereby all people have equal opportunities to employment, development and advancement (Fielding, 1997). It is a term that is often used interchangeably with “affirmative action”, which in turn refers to “a short term strategy to open the corporate doors for previously disadvantaged people” (Thomas, 1996, pp. 7). South African business has always been diverse, with black

employees occupying the lower rungs of the employment ladder. Opening the doors to creating a diverse workforce at more senior levels and ensuring the upward mobility of previously disadvantaged groups are steps which are promoted by comprehensive programmes of affirmative action (Thomas, 1996).

In an article placed in Independent Newspapers in November 2000, the organisation involved in this study publicly announced its commitment to employment equity by stating, "it is vital that successful political transition in South Africa is supported by economic transformation, which results in a more equitable spread of wealth and career opportunities amongst all our people". They acknowledged that although the organisation's overall staff profile were reasonably representative of South Africa's demographics at the time of the publication, there was under-representation at middle and senior management levels.

As many of the posts that need to be filled require highly specialised training, the company often finds it difficult to find people who have the right qualifications. This seems to have a negative impact on other employees already in these areas, as it puts greater pressure on them while they wait for someone to fill the vacant posts. It was suggested by a white participant that this sometimes results in hostility being displayed towards the person who is eventually employed in that position.

- *W3P9: ...the problem in our area is that we've got a very technical area, and we need a lot of professional people to work there and just generally, in terms of employment equity, there aren't that many blacks... there isn't for example a single black actuary at the moment in South Africa...there are a lot of black actuaries from other countries...Zimbabwe, etc. Where you've got an Employment Equity requirement, it's almost impossible to get those people...they are being snapped up out there in the market...and because it takes so long, it places a greater and greater strain on people who are there so when this person comes around they are all ready so aggravated and tired etc. etc. that you know, the relationship is doomed.*

The organisation informed the public that systems and programmes had been put in place to address the current situation. It was reported that one of the major contributors to difficulties experienced in addressing employment equity on middle and senior management levels was South Africa's skills and experience shortage. In an attempt to realise the potential talent in South Africa, the organisation has implemented a range of training, development and skills transfer programmes. Recruitment policies, incorporated mentorship and other mechanisms to provide new recruits the opportunity to acquire the

experience necessary to equip them for senior positions has recently been reviewed. In addition, the organisation launched a "Corporate University" in 2001, the first of its kind in South Africa, to reinforce the concept of continuous learning within the company and to "grow their own talent".

This organisation prides itself in its commitment to employment equity and the development of employees' potential. It has already compiled and submitted an Employment Equity Plan and two reports to the Department of Labour since June 2000. In addition, it has an Employment Equity Department that serves as a centre which guides business units on how best to achieve and manage employment equity. This department has also developed and launched an employment equity section on the company's Intranet and uses it to offer ongoing training and place regular updates to keep staff informed of issues related to employment equity. Furthermore, it has established a Corporate Employment Equity Forum which consists of business unit employment equity drivers and business unit consultation committees.

In this study, the issue of employment equity was raised repeatedly by participants and seems to play a prominent role in intercultural exchanges in this organisation. Black participants are aware that many white colleagues hold negative perceptions regarding employment equity and are especially sensitive to the hostilities that result from the implementation of the act.

- *B8P1: ...for a black person to get into a company, which is probably predominantly white, or a team who is probably white, um there is always some hostilities. You must expect that. And the onus is on you to work on those hostile environments in order to progress.*
- *B2P5: You see when someone doesn't want to get too close to you and doesn't want to interact with you that often...just giving you room, and just keeping it very professional. You can often pick it up...that someone creates a room around themselves...I would say...60%, are still like that...they still have the feeling, "You're here because you're black", you know.*

Feelings of frustration and disappointment came through with regards to unrealistic expectations that are placed on black employees who are placed through the employment equity process. A number of black participants indicated that the standards are sometimes too high. In addition, black participants expressed their concern that many white colleagues expect them to perform poorly in their appointments. This puts extreme pressure on black employees and creates enormous anxiety and stress.

- *B2P9:the expectation is...you are in management, you have been elected out of so many, you must be damn good, you're supposed to know all these things...just too high standards. They don't take it that it's a learning process for you. Of course you're good, you've been to universities and you've done those things, but when you get to the work environment, something that you've never done before, it's a whole new world...learning new things. And they expect you, in 2, 3 months time to actually be very productive. And this is a lot of pressure...it actually makes you feel...maybe I don't belong here. Maybe I've been chosen because I'm black. Maybe it's because of the system. It makes you feel bad. That's the biggest weakness. That people are just brought to management positions. Sometimes you feel like you're brought...then set out to fail. You are brought in to say, "Ok, now you're bringing black people, okay, you're stealing the white male, but at the end of the day these people are useless."*
- *B8P2:*
B: ...it is...uphill...it's an uphill battle.
R: Cos...it's harder to prove yourself?
B: ...yes it is.
R: ...and when you fail, it's almost like...
B: Ja, it's not...it was envisaged. So basically you shouldn't fail...it's a lot of pressure.

The organisation's Employment Equity Manager reported that the organisation "needs successful role models that will challenge people's mindsets". It was reported that there are currently differing perceptions within the company with regard to ensuring that employees appointed through the company's employment equity policy are "suitably qualified". This term refers to the relationship between an employee's potential and the development of that potential in a time period that is cost-effective and acceptable to the organisation. The Employment Equity Department is aware that this in turn pressurises employees and is currently addressing the issue, but indicated to the researcher that this is going to be a long and challenging process.

4.4.3. Adaptation and Conformity to the Corporate Culture and Organisational Culture

Adapting to the corporate world and climate of an organisation is a difficult process even in a homogeneous workplace. In a heterogeneous organisation such as the one involved in this study, the challenges that new employees, particularly black employees, face are vast. For many black participants, the process of adapting to the corporate environment is

a form of acculturation, as it is a process of adapting to another culture. Many of the black participants described how this difficulty is heightened by, among other things, lack of experience, cultural isolation, poor support, unrealistic expectations and hostility. Feelings of frustration, hopelessness, anxiety and resentment abound.

Ruben (1977) suggests that the ability to react to new and ambiguous situations with little visible discomfort is an important skill involved in acculturation. Excessive discomfort can lead to confusion, frustration, or even hostility, which may be dysfunctional to the development of effective interpersonal relationships within and across cultures.

In this organisation, it appears that for many employees, the process of acculturation is often a long, difficult and lonely one.

- *B7P9: Ag, that's a difficult adjustment...a difficult adjustment and I think people are taking it for granted.*

Employees who struggle to adapt to the corporate climate experience a number of negative reactions including increased anxiety, hostility, bitterness and frustration. Employees often feel extremely isolated and intimidated. Some black participants even expressed the desire to resign as the difficulties are often so overwhelming.

- *B2P9: ...you feel like...I don't want to go to work anymore. I'd rather work in a more relaxed environment, where I have all my 100% confidence...you feel like...resigning sometimes.*
- *B1P7: It can belittle a person (unintelligible). It can easily belittle a person. And it can make you develop an attitude...towards that individual...resentfulness. The kind of...who does that person think he or she is?*

Similarly, many black participants reported that although the initial stages of adaptation to the corporate environment are difficult, with time these difficulties lessen as one becomes accustomed to the norms of colleagues and the organisation in general.

- *B2P9: ...with time...you learn new things and you develop yourself, and you get to understand the terminology, the language and all the concepts, you tend to like it, you know. I think that's something that people must understand. You have never been given a chance, never before, and all of a sudden you're given a huge responsibility which demands you to be very productive and...which...a lot of expectations. And you're just simply expected to tend to those things in the amount of time you're given...but once you get your things right, you just develop,*

you just become good. And that's when you start enjoying your work and people start commenting and saying you're good...and that's when you realise, "I'm good". But at the beginning they make you feel like you're stupid.

Some black participants indicated that due to the nature of this organisation's culture, they are required to suppress their true identities during work hours and are only able to reveal their true personalities during informal contact that takes place during work hours.

- *B3P9: ...I will come here say at 07:00 and leave at say, 18:30, or 19:00. That's...12 hours a day. Now if I have to be someone else, imagine what that does to you...I'm [B3P9], I'm this person who talks, who likes meeting people. When I take a break I like coming over and saying, "Let's talk. What did you do yesterday?" Blah, blah, blah, blah, that's my way of taking a break – let's go...downstairs, we have coffee and talk... Now that means that part of me I have to leave at home, you see? That's my way of relaxing, I cannot do that, I have to leave that at home, I have to find something else. Either I don't take a break...what does that do to my productivity? Now what I'm saying is...let's not turn people into something else when they come to work. Let people be themselves and I'm pretty sure productivity can go higher... because people are comfortable, they are themselves, they are creative. Creativeness comes with being yourself, being...relaxed. You cannot be creative if you are tense, you know?*

Data from the interviews suggests that white employees also go through an adaptation process when people from different cultures are introduced to their area. It appears that white participants are aware that they hold preconceived assumptions about black colleagues and that it takes time to become comfortable with working and communicating with each other. This supports Mammam's (1995) argument that "the longer an employee stays in a multi-cultural workplace the more likely he/she will acquire the knowledge relevant for reducing uncertainty during intercultural interaction" (p. 532).

- *W8P7: I think, you know, certainly...for a newer individual in the area...until such time as I've got a good feel and appreciation for his....what his capability and his abilities are...um, I'll possibly...be at pains to...possibly explain more than what I should, as opposed to, you know, just...saying, "Here's a task, go out and do it," you know?*
- *W3P1: ...over the months that we have worked together I think...I have grown to understand him a bit better and I think likewise as well. So I think if you asked me these questions about 2 months ago we might have seen a very different picture...I think because we have worked together a bit more, I think I've grown to understand the way he speaks, the way he looks at me and that sort of thing a bit better...Initially, I think probably both he and I were a little bit unsure about our roles in the organisation and towards each other...and I think there were*

more times when there were these awkward silences maybe in conversation and in meetings...uh, whereas now, I think I certainly understand how he operates and I actually can interact better with him and I think we compliment each other a bit more.

The availability of helpful, empathetic colleagues appears to assist in this process.

- *B3P3: ...one has got to come in and try to blend...to find some commonality, you know, with your work group.*
- *B2P4: I would say he has a black manner...a black man's heart...I'll say that. I mean, for the fact that when I came over for the first time...when you meet a black man on the floor it's like, "Oh my God, oh my goodness"...and to my surprise he was there all the time for me, trying to show me things around and trying to make me very comfortable and I must say, that was not expected of him to do something like that.*

Conformity to the corporate culture is expected of all employees. This is difficult for many black employees as it means that they often have to conform to Western norms and values in order to be accepted and recognised by their white colleagues.

- *B5P8: It was very difficult for me to adjust in the first place. I had a colleague of mine...in the head office...who even told me you have to jump on other men's shoulders to be seen to move...that's corporate politics. So I had to adjust and see things not as I used to see them in the outskirts in the Eastern Cape where you would see a colleague as a real colleague...as somebody you can lean on and somebody who you can just trust ...but with politics and with a lot of people competing for upward mobility...recognition, whatever...there's is a lot of back stabbing.*
- *B1P26: there's the perception that...uh...the corporate world is a white world so you have to do things the white way...there's no culture of business...there's no black culture...black business culture...you can't find it...it's undefined.*

While some feel that conformity is necessary, others feel that the amount of conformity required could be reduced by improving their colleagues' awareness of cultural differences.

- *B1P26: ...black people tend to be more conscious...of what white people perceive to be the right way...in the corporate world. And conform to that. You know you go to other places, you go the Middle East...the Arabs don't care who you are. You greet their way and that is it. You're Bill Clinton, you're whoever. But now why we have to change when we go to other*

cultures? But I think both cultures ...we need to conform to the Western way of doing business. We tend to come and conform, as I'm saying, I can live it...for practical reasons it's got to be like that...but both parties have to put in effort. Sometimes it might be that...if we have a meeting, you might have to give into some of the things that I...grew up doing...or what my life is like. Obviously I'm not saying I must pitch up 30 minutes late for a meeting because that's African time (laughs), but there might be things...it might be that 50% of the time I'm looking at you, 50% I'm not...because it's just that when I'm speaking to a person, I'm not used to like looking at them in the eye right through. There's not enough effort.

Other black participants approached the issue of conforming to the corporate culture very differently and viewed it as an essential part of their professional development.

- *B3P13: I don't look at it as change. I look at it as development. I look at it as things I never had...that I need to have. It complements what I have...I want to be able to...to act on merit and if it needs me to be humble, democratic, you know, I will do that. (unintelligible) but if it needs me to be hard, then I should be able to do that.*

The following section will discuss the participants' perceptions surrounding further training and support regarding cultural diversity and intercultural communication.

4.5. TRAINING AND SUPPORT

“As South Africans we must stop being defensive. We need to acknowledge the influence of having grown up and lived in South Africa. Hearts and minds must change” (September, 1994. pp. 28).

4.5.1. The Need for Training

As mentioned previously, the organisation involved in this study has publicly announced its commitment to employment equity and skills development. In 1999 the organisation spent 8% of its annual payroll on training. This compares favourably with international trends, where the average percentage spent on training by international companies in 1997 was 2.3%.

However, the majority of black participants and a few white participants felt that there is a lack of training programmes available to employees in the organisation regarding intercultural communication and cultural diversity.

- *B1P10: ...there's nothing that's ever been formal...in terms of integration. I've been away almost 5 years, I came back...I don't know what's gone through then and now, you know, but uh...my gut feel is that nothing has happened therefore I don't see much changes.*
- *B5P8: That one is long overdue...diversity management workshops...would at least enlighten...that is the first step for me...that is the first step. If we all go there...at least somebody...you know that your senior or your colleague has been there, you will know that he will understand you better.*
- *B4P10: Definitely, I think there's a need for it.*
- *B6P7: Um, I really think so. I think even those people who have a good command of the language need to be able to relate to other people who are not at their level so to be able to be able to express themselves well, um and also to be able to talk effectively across things...whether it be personal, informal, technical, business...and also on the telephone.*
- *W4P9: Yes, especially for diversity training...I think there is a lack of understanding culture between people.*

Many of the white participants indicated that they find such training unnecessary.

- *W6P7: ...I wouldn't say there's a need for that kind of thing. I've never felt uncomfortable or been approached with inappropriate communication.*
- *W7P7: I think it's complex though, you know I don't know how easy it is to...and I question whether sort of a training program would...make any...difference... you know? It's such...a core part of...who people are...that to try and change that at a half day session...telling people that we all come from different cultures and we have different ways of expressing ourselves, I don't think it'll necessarily do that, certainly it'll raise awareness but I think people are generally aware of that anyway...that we're different...*

Although a few white participants indicated a need for such training, some of these participants indicated that it was other people, not themselves, who would benefit from it.

- *W7P7: ...I think in other areas of this business, yes, definitely. I mean, the other areas where there are strong differences in the culture and you can see it in the way they deal...certainly like in the back office areas...I think where very often your...your backgrounds are a lot different, um...when I say back offices, the operations, you know, the guys who are capturing data or...the processing guys.*

Numerous participants felt that such training should aim to improve awareness of cultural differences and the challenges that people from different cultures experience in this organisation. In terms of communication, suggestions for the content of these courses included improving awareness of second language issues and non-verbal communication. According to Singelis (1994), nonverbal communication is a fundamental part of intercultural interactions and is an aspect of communication which is often overlooked in training.

- *B4P10: I think the realities and the difficulties that we...sometimes experience. As I was saying to you, you need to think in Xhosa and translate all the time in English, it's quite difficult. And also the fact that...because we are from different backgrounds we've got different interests.*
- *B6P7: ...my personal feeling...is that it needs to focus on non-verbal communication...sometimes it becomes difficult for...white people I come across to speak effectively and sometimes you can just see their non-verbal communication, they're not understanding the way you're communicating...um...so I think it would just put everybody at*

easy. And if you are talking...communicating with somebody and you see they are completely not at easy, it also makes you uneasy a bit.

The support that black employees receive when starting work at this organisation seems to play an essential role in the adaptation process. Participants who were not provided with appropriate training and guidance from the beginning, discussed the difficulty in trying to maintain one's composure while adapting to the organisation and its expectations.

- *B2P11: another huge problem...is lack of training. They say, "We give you this position, you are a trainee manager," and yet nobody's there to hold your hand and guide you through until you can actually run on your own...you're given a list of tasks to do...and it's upon you to find ways to start asking people, sometimes you cannot know who to ask...and when to ask it because people are too busy and involved in their own little...doing things. And it's such...a strenuous situation...because you don't know where to go from here...I think there's a huge need of...understandability of where you come from and how we are...and how people should be taken from one step to another.*

A number of white participants reported observing their black colleagues being "thrown in the deep end" and indicated that this lack of support puts additional pressure on other employees in the process.

- *W2P2: he was dumped in here to swim and he swam quite well. Uh, he's learnt a lot, he's probably learnt a hell of a lot more cos he's taken quite a lot of the tasks that I used to do over...*
- *W8P10: Um, he also wasn't provided with the necessary training...um, to operate as auditor. Uh...you know so that....that led to frustration...upon his part. Uh...it also led to frustration on the part of others...who at that time were responsible for supervising him. Um, I had even said to him at...one stage...I felt that he was actually wasting his time...and I told him as much.*

Besides a lack of technical training, a number of black participants felt that the organisation does not offer enough psychological support for employees who have been appointed through employment equity.

- *B8P3: ...if you are pushing in numbers into departments, you know like affirmative action, you should also...have a mechanism or a structure in place that will also help them... um to*

manage their emotions and all their frustrations that they are getting through the field. Because you are not there...

One black participant felt that intercultural communication training is not necessary if there are only a few black employees within a department. He felt that the costs of the training would outweigh the benefits and that it would only become necessary once the organisation starts to meet its employment equity figures.

- *B7P14: Um...in my department specifically (laughs)...I don't know...not...I mean, it depends entirely on proportions...out of 100 people there are...no more than 10 black people at the most...and I think the little there are...they are having trouble communicating, but because we're so few, the communication problem is not so huge. But I think...as you try and meet your employment equity figures and you start increasing the number of black people there and the proportion, communication is going to start playing a big role. Right now, I don't think it's playing such a big role, but probably because, I don't know, I tend to think it's alright to prejudice a minority...I don't think it's alright, but I think...you weigh costs and benefits kind of thing, and if 4 out of 100 people are having communication problems, you can kind of let it slide, rather than 20 people in 100 people having communication problems. Each of those people, it's a big problem, but because there's just so many other channels, I think eventually we all find our ways to communicate around...even though we can't...be understood. But I think the more we get...the more we just have to learn to communicate across. Cos right now, if someone like [black colleague] downstairs cannot say something to a manager, they can easily try and find me...tell me...and I'll tell that manager. But I think the more of us that come, the less acceptable and appropriate it will be for us to try and find other black people to which we can say our things.*

Most of the black participants felt that these programmes should be compulsory, while most of the white participants felt that they should be optional.

- *B5P9:*
R: Do you think it is a good idea if it is compulsory?
B: It is, yes it is, because people are too busy to even uh...polish their skills or to get new knowledge.
- *W4P8: ...you aren't forced, but obviously there is a lot of encouragement, but it's still your own decision if you want to do it or not...you are just going to build resistance by forcing people to go. You could rather try and market it and sell it in a specific way that people want to go but definitely not forcing people to go...you are just going to make people negative.*

4.5.2. Availability and Involvement in Training

A number of participants, both black and white, indicated that they were aware of various training programmes being offered at the organisation. These included training on the company's business strategy and improving relations between employees.

None of the participants had been involved in or had been offered any training focusing specifically on intercultural communication.

Some of the participants had already been involved or were soon to be involved in one or more of the organisation's business school training programmes which focused on employment equity and cultural diversity. In addition to these, a programme on cultural diversity, which was conducted by an independent company, was mentioned by some participants. All participants who had been involved in training felt that they had benefited from it.

- *B5P10:*
B: ...we are encouraged to talk about things that we don't agree with...I have participated in all the workshops that were arranged here.
R: Do you think it's been a positive campaign?
F: Yes
- *W6P8: ...we had a...cultural diversity workshop...something they launched maybe 2 years ago, just to get everyone aware about what it is like to come from...maybe a background that's not as privileged or to have a stigma attached to you, what it feels like to have that kind of thing, so that was very eye opening, I found... I think it taught a lot of people...there's a lot of people out there who haven't had the kind of education and advantages you've had and it doesn't mean they haven't potential, it just means they haven't had the opportunities in the past so, you know, you can't...put them down...or they'll never get anywhere...*
- *W3P8: Our area is going on an Employment Equity Workshop sometime in December...*

One black participant had sought help from an external organisation for voice and articulation training, as he had been told that this aspect of his communication needed improvement.

- *B1P26: It did help to some extent...but there's nothing that beats practicing the thing everyday. I mean [private programme] is only a couple of sessions. And there...will give you words, suggestions...proposals on how...to improve. But then it's left with you to improve. And*

that's where the real battle is...it's yourself improving. It was...presentation skills and then taping yourself, listening to yourself, critically examining yourself. I think we did 3 recordings, and looking at the progress...over a period of two weeks. Um...and pointing out...non-verbal communication and all that. Ja, it was just giving the overview of how you should do things. You know how you should communicate and how effective is the communication if you do things like that and that. So as I say it did help to some extent, but it took me practicing it at the end of the day.

Some of the participants who had been involved in communication training at the organisation indicated that the content of the programmes was limited and did not extend to all of the situations which they find problematic.

- *B1P23: And courses...here...you find that...it might be specific to the business...how do you present...presentation skills. Presentation skills and communication are not necessarily the same thing...*
- *B6P6: We did a little non-verbal communication but it was more under what you could expect um in the workplace...they just touched a little bit on non-verbal communication and what to do when chatting to people like at a cocktail party, when you find two people chatting and they're facing each other. But it was never about verbal communication and how to hold effective business meetings...I haven't had that...or if there was, I wasn't informed about it.*

Certain participants felt that it is important for employees who attend workshops within the organisation to know who else attends them. Numerous black participants commented that the current campaign is effective, as it ensures that the organisation's senior and executive management are involved at all times.

- *B5P9: ...they are starting with top management because the challenge has been that...managers will delegate their subordinates to go to courses, whereas they are the people who need these courses. When you [are] attending a course you will sit there thinking, "What am I doing here? The person who is supposed to be here is the person I report to!" ...so if we can make sure that with courses like those, as [the organisation] is doing now, is making sure that all the line management, senior management is going to attend those courses...if they can be strong in that and make sure they they do attend, then it will be easy...yes.*

In Chapter 5, the findings reported in Chapter 4 will be further integrated and related to past literature. Possible explanations for the findings and the development of a model

reflecting the complex and multi-dimensional nature of intercultural communication will be presented.

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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In summary of the findings of this study it is clear that when investigating intercultural communication in South African business organisations, one cannot examine linguistic and communicative acts without considering the greater whole, including psychological aspects, the context of South Africa and the particular culture of the organisation being studied. Workforces in South Africa today typically consist of men and women of different backgrounds, age groups, educational levels and political beliefs representing various cultural groups and 11 different languages (Hall, 1995). Although many authors emphasise the fact that such diversity in the workplace should be used as a strategic asset (see Lategan, 1999; September, 1994), one needs to consider the problems that are likely to arise.

Figure 13 summarises the findings of this study and presents a model developed by the researcher which depicts these complexities. In addition to displaying the unique findings of this study, this model also reflects the work of other researchers. This model reflects intercultural communication as a multidimensional construct, which includes linguistic aspects, psychological aspects, the South African context, as well as the organisational context.

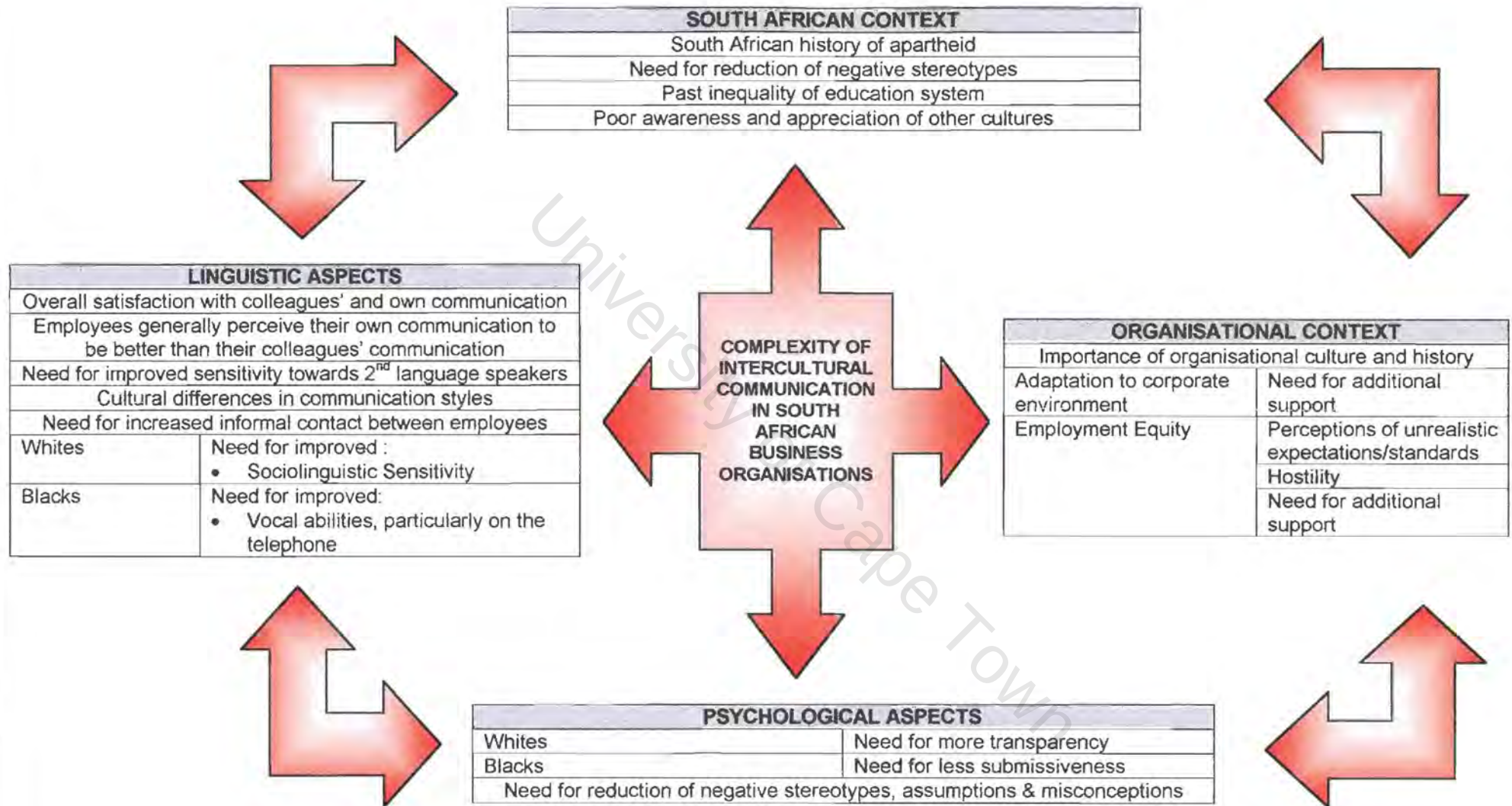


Figure 13: Model of Complexity of Intercultural Communication in a South African Business Organisation

Similarly to Mammam (1995), this model recognises a number of psychological, sociobiological, experiential and organisational factors as the major factors impacting on intercultural communication effectiveness in a multicultural workplace. The model also incorporates some elements of Hall's (1995) work which suggests that the South African political history of segregation, the diversity of the South African work forces, and the transformation and liberation of South African society, on both a political and socio-economic level, are three major external factors which influence communication between members of a South African organisation. All of these factors create barriers to effective communication in a multicultural workplace that subsequently increase the risk of communication breakdown between employees. Misunderstandings and misconceptions are bound to occur if organisational communication is planned without taking all these influences into account (Hall, 1995; Lategan, 1999; Mammam, 1995; September, 1994; Steyn, 1994).

In terms of *linguistic aspects* per se, and with reference to Figure 13, the findings of this study indicated overall satisfaction across participants in relation to their colleagues' and their own communication skills in the workplace. However, it became clear that the setting in which communication takes place present their own unique challenges in the South African workplace. A major finding in this regard related to black participants' perceptions that there is a lack of informal communication between different cultures in the workplace. Participants suggested that this is largely due to a previous lack of exposure between cultures, differences in personal interests, cultural prejudice and the existence of negative stereotypes and assumptions. This needs to be addressed as strong empirical evidence indicates that social support facilitates psychological well-being during acculturation (Ward, 1996).

The study also revealed that although participants reported overall satisfaction with communication, there are specific areas of communication which need to be addressed. In this study, black participants suggested that their white colleagues need to address their sociolinguistic sensitivity and control of semantic content, particularly turn-taking, listening skills and reaction to communication breakdown. White participants felt that their black colleagues need to improve upon their vocal abilities, particularly speech clarity, on the telephone.

Another interesting finding was that on the whole, participants' perceptions of their own communication were more positive than perceptions of their colleagues'

communication. This suggests that participants are perhaps not aware of their own areas of difficulty and inappropriacy in intercultural exchanges in the workplace.

The political, cultural and economic divisions between black and white South Africans are exacerbated by "one of the least debated but most consequential social inequalities: the problem of language" (James & Lever, 2001, pp. 51). There is a definite advantage in education and business for those with high competence in English. As a result, many black people who speak an African language as their first language are automatically at a disadvantage. Thus, although English is the language of commerce and many believe that it is politically neutral, using English as a *lingua franca* in South African organisations poses a further barrier to effective intercultural communication (Mitchell, 1998; Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001). It appears that many black employees in South African business organisations today are facing major difficulties as proficiency in English is expected, but for many, this is not their first language. Wood (1995) describes this language dilemma further:

"Even though you are fluent, it can often take a split second more before your thoughts in English come out into speech and you still have to search a bit for words to make yourself clear...It's a struggle to get a word in edgeways...you often have the feeling that you're missing something and don't know whether what you're missing is important or not. By the time you're ready to ask, the subject has changed." (p. 12)

In addition to the lack of sensitivity towards the dilemmas facing second and third language speakers, communication styles are further affected by cultural differences. For many black participants who have a more traditional African worldview, the process of adapting to the corporate world in general, but specifically to corporate communication styles, has been difficult. Reports by black participants indicate that at times, the use of certain communication skills (such as listening, turn taking, topic control) in the corporate world contradicts the African cultural norms regarding the use of these communication skills. According to Sodvsky et al (1994 cited in Steyn, 1997), "worldviews...influence cognitive processes, including styles of communication, information processing, decision making, and social interaction" (pp. 70). Steyn (1997) warns that although it is realistic to expect the influence of the African worldview to effect significant differences between the perceptions of competence of African South Africans and the Western view of competence, there is

a danger of over generalising. She stresses that context plays a crucial role when exploring how worldviews affect communication styles, particularly in South Africa.

As other researchers suggest, intercultural communication in business organisations is further affected by the individual *psychological attributes* of employees. The results of this study revealed a need for an increase of openness and transparency in the workplace on the part of white employees, as well as a reduction in submissiveness on the part of black employees. This study also highlighted the need for reduction of negative stereotypes, assumptions and misconceptions towards people of different cultures in the workplace.

Due to the unique nature of this country's situation, international research on intercultural communication cannot be applied directly to the **South Africa context** (Kaschula & Anthonissen, 1995; Steyn, 1997). In particular, the prominent influence that South Africa's history of apartheid and the current status of the country exerts on relations and interactions across cultures should not be underestimated. While the typical South African workforce is multilingual and multicultural, the country's legacy of racial segregation and discrimination, as well as the history of inequality within the South African education system, has resulted in little awareness and appreciation between people of different cultures. South Africa is currently in the process of re-evaluating the past and reconstructing the future along more equitable lines (Steyn & Motshabi, 1996; Steyn, 2001).

The findings of this study revealed that the past is still affecting intercultural communication between employees on both a formal and informal level in today's South African business organisation. Some black participants in this study indicated that stereotypes and misconceptions are reinforced by a lack of interest in other cultures, thus confirming Chick's (1995) theory of the negative cycle of socially created discrimination in South Africa.

Chick (1990 cited in Chick, 1995) uses a model to describe "how the ideologies, values and structures of the wider society constrain what takes place in everyday interactions, and how such activity impacts upon circumstances in institutions and the society as a whole" (Chick, 1995, pp. 237).

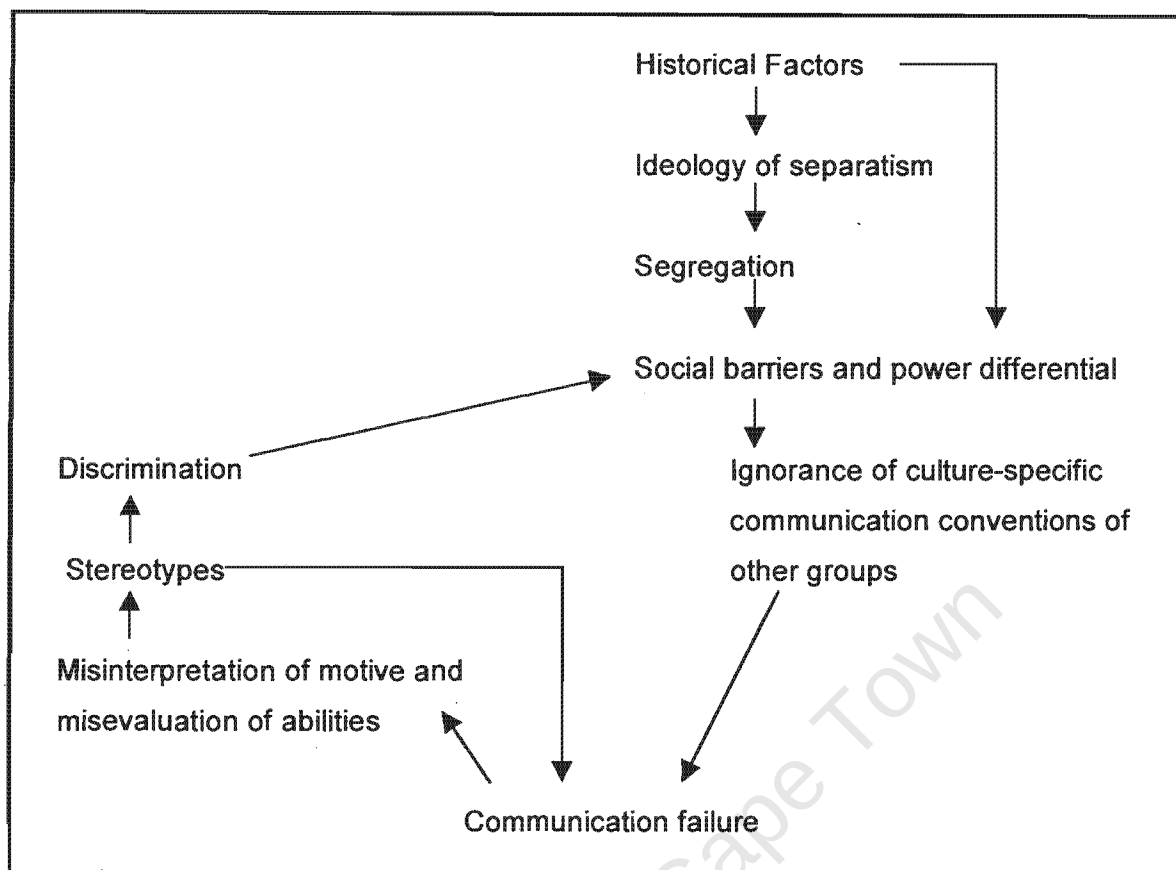


Figure 14: Negative Cycle of Socially Created Discrimination
(Chick, 1990 in Chick, 1995, pp. 238)

With reference to Figure 14, Chick (1995) explains that South Africa's history of apartheid has led to "an ideology of separatism, legally enforced segregation and social and economic distancing between the various cultural groups" (pp. 238). As a result, people are ignorant of the cultural backgrounds and communicative conventions of culturally different others, which increases the risk of intercultural miscommunication. This miscommunication is in turn believed to contribute to widespread misevaluation of the abilities of members of subordinate groups and subsequently the reinforcement of culturally negative stereotypes and discrimination. This was something which was noted in this study.

Due to the past inequality of the education system that was created by the apartheid government, South African youth came through "a strictly divided and fragmented education system, characterised by gross inequity in terms of investment per child, syllabi, resources, linguistic fit of tuition and every other aspect of education" (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001, pp. 17). The results of this study confirm Mammam's (1995) suggestion that in a multicultural organisation, employees who are perceived to have

high levels of education by the dominant group usually command greater respect and improve their chances of receiving favourable responses during interaction.

Mammam (1995) warns that high educational attainment can attract jealousy and resentment from some members of the organisation, “especially if educational attainment is viewed as a source of power and/or career development” (pp. 537).

It was clear in this study that within African cultures, there is a growing rift between those black employees who are able to display familiarity with the signifiers of the norm, and those who have not been exposed to white, English culture to the same extent. These employees are perceived to be able to find their way through the system with much greater ease and are used to ‘show up’ those who are closer to African cultures and languages (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001). The influence of the ‘experience dimension’ on intercultural communication in the workplace can be applied to the above phenomenon and the finding that participants’ length of employment seems to affect their perceptions of intercultural communication. People who have had experience in working with diverse workforces are argued to be more effective interculturally than those who have not (Mammam, 1995).

Knowing and understanding an **organisation’s history and culture**, when studying intercultural communication in a particular organisation, is essential. Workplaces are cultures, as organisations develop “distinctive sets of emotionalised, collectively held beliefs that impel members of these organisations to act in certain ways” (Trice, 1993, pp. xi). Besides providing the researcher with an in-depth description of the nature of this organisation’s culture, members of this organisation’s executive management team informed the researcher that there are indeed subcultures in place in this organisation. Reports from participants confirm this and suggest that numerous subcultures exist within the known organisational culture. In addition to reports that employees from different cultures do not participate in enough informal exchanges during work hours, a number of participants reported that, regardless of culture, there is a lack of informal contact between employees from different divisions and business units.

Another major organisational factor influencing intercultural communication in this organisation appears to be closely related to the company’s employment equity policy, a finding which supports current literature (see Mammam, 1995; September, 1995; Steyn, 1997; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001; Thomas, 1996; Trice, 1993). It is proposed that South Africa is a microcosm and laboratory for the global problem of

racial inequality. Thus, its successes and failures related to employment equity allow for wider lessons to be drawn (Adam, 2000). Unlike most other countries where minorities are targeted, in South Africa “a previously disenfranchised majority is the beneficiary of preferential labour policies” (Adam, 2000, pp. xi).

According to Steyn and Van Zyl (2001), “the failure to create an equitable environment for the diverse groups that live, work, study, and play in any social context is now recognised to constitute a form of human rights abuse” (pp. 2). Thus, South African business organisations are currently under pressure to implement affirmative action in an attempt to address the extraordinary levels of inequality resulting from the country’s history of apartheid. (Ramphela, 1995, September, 1997) It has generated a great deal of heated debate and evokes strong emotions from both sides of the divide in South Africa (Adam, 2000; Ramphela, 1995; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001). Policies of employment equity have encountered resistance from “a colonial establishment that still equates promotion of the previously disadvantaged with lowering standards” (Adam, 2000, pp. xi). While employment equity programmes have been introduced in major South African organisations, “the holistic process of going beyond this to effectively manage diverse employees, at all levels in the organisation, for competitive advantage, has generally not been recognised” (Thomas, 1996, pp. 58)

Although this organisation has recognised that employment equity policies can create enormous challenges in the South African workplace and has invested a great deal of money and effort into addressing these issues, many of the black participants still reported that they encountered numerous difficulties in adapting to the corporate climate. These difficulties were attributed to, among other things, unrealistic expectations by management, hostility and stereotypes of other employees, lack of informal contact within the workplace and lack of organisational support. The situation is so overwhelming for some participants that they reported a loss of personal and cultural identity during work hours. For some, the situation is or was so severe that they had considered resigning from the organisation.

The process of acculturation in an organisation refers to the ability to adapt to the corporate culture (Ruben, 1977). If the present culture of the organisation is not flexible enough, the acceptance of different cultural groups may be difficult and problematic (Fielding, 1997). Adey & Andrew (1990) believe that acculturation in business is just as important, if not more important, than acculturation in the wider

society. They suggest that this is because employees can choose to keep to their own cultures outside working hours, but at work they are compelled for the majority of their day to fit in with the organisational culture. Employee intercultural communication effectiveness in a multicultural workplace is therefore influenced by the level of organisational support regarding workplace diversity. In South Africa, business organisations have a responsibility to understand and compensate for deficiencies in the educational opportunities of their employees, as education enables people to adjust more easily to unfamiliar situations and therefore influences intercultural communication (Adey and Andrew, 1996; Mammam, 1995).

Multiculturalism requires people to reduce their ethnocentric attitudes and work at recognising, tolerating, understanding and appreciating cultures other than one's own (September, 1994). Mammam (1995) suggests that organisations that are genuinely committed to equal opportunity in the workplace should have policies and programmes that enhance employees' intercultural effectiveness. Ward (1996) suggests that culture-specific knowledge, acquired both before and during a cross-cultural transition, is associated with enhanced sociocultural adaptation. The sources of this kind of knowledge may come via previous intercultural experience and/or training. Individuals and management must strive to create an atmosphere of trust within the organisation, by helping people to understand the major barriers to intercultural communication. (Fielding, 1997; Ruben, 1977; Steyn, 1993).

Ward (1996) reports that there is a large amount of evidence that has shown that training has had a positive effect in a number of areas of intercultural adjustment. These include affective, behavioural and cognitive domains. According to Steyn (1994), an understanding of another's culture, particularly of the values of the culture, is known to "enhance empathy and can be augmented through sound training" (pp. 18). Dēshpande and Viswesvaran (1992 cited in Ward, 1996) investigated the impact of training on various variables of intercultural adaptation and found that programs exerted a direct effect on self-development (e.g. psychological well-being, increased self-confidence) and perceptions. However, ill-advised training programmes may result in further stereotyping.

In South Africa, "the sheer inertia of the past has a formidable force in resisting change" (Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001, pp. 28). Fielding (1997) believes that accepting differences in an open and honest way will improve relationships and therefore improve the success of an organisation. Generalisations cannot be avoided in

intercultural communication. Rather, uninformed, largely negative stereotypes need to be replaced with more accurate and positive generalisations. Awareness needs to be raised about approaching people of different cultures with an open mind (Steyn, 1994). When dealing with intercultural communication in the workplace, we need to acknowledge both similarity and difference. "By focusing on similarities, we build positive attitudes and highlight mutual benefit and cooperation. By valuing difference we defuse potential conflict, acknowledge and respect each other's experience and keep the process grounded in reality." (Steyn, 1994, pp. 18)

Increased intercultural communication and relationships are inevitable in the workplace (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Fielding, 1992). It is crucial that South African organisations accept that they have a responsibility to train and educate their employees to be able to cope with such interactions. In order to emphasise the urgency of the situation, one should consider the implications that communication breakdown can have on business. Dishonesty, time wastage, duplicity of work, decreased productivity, lack of teamwork, lack of trust, and animosity between employees are, among others, examples of these implications (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Hall, 1995). These implications in turn have potentially negative financial implications for organisations (Hall, 1995).

According to Human (1996), managing diversity is not about pretending that all cultures are equal, but rather it is about addressing negative expectations and perceptions towards other cultures without unduly reinforcing cultural differences.

"South African organisations have to create organisational environments which allow those who are willing and able to contribute, to do so at their maximum potential. This demands a shift in thinking to seeing beyond the 'traditional' employee who fits the 'traditional' box, but an appreciation of what 'non-traditional' employees can contribute to the company. It demands a commitment to training, development and opportunity-giving. But underlying this, it demands an appreciation of risking change. In essence, managing diversity in South Africa is not about empowered whites bestowing on disempowered blacks a measure of authority and knowledge. It is about an acknowledgement of the past and a committed joint planning for the future." (Thomas, 1996, pp. 58)

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to investigate the perceptions of intercultural communication of a sample of black and white middle managerial level employees within a South African organisation.

The main finding of the study was that the complexity involved in the study of intercultural communication in South African business organisations is beyond the mere realm of linguistics, but stresses the importance of understanding the psychological attributes of employees and the various contexts in which intercultural communication takes place.

More specifically, the findings of the study support current South African literature which highlights the significant influence that the South African history of apartheid, educational inequality and the resultant stereotypes and prejudice have on intercultural interactions between employees in today's South African business organisation. The lack of understanding, appreciation and tolerance of different cultures in the workplace needs to be addressed.

Furthermore, the importance of considering the organisational context, which includes the organisational culture and climate, was highlighted. While the importance of valuing workforce diversity is widely acknowledged, it appears that the corporate culture to a large extent still reflects white Eurocentric worldviews, which makes it difficult for many black employees to adapt to the corporate climate. In addition, the challenges created by employment equity policies are multifaceted.

In this study, participants' ratings of their colleagues' and their own communication skills were combined with data from in-depth semi-structured interviews. In general, results from the interviews were found to confirm findings from the questionnaire and added value and insight to questionnaire findings. It is felt that meeting with senior management in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the organisational culture helped to contextualise the findings within this organisation's history and culture. It is believed that a strength of this study was the triangulation of methods of data collection, which ensured a combined emic and etic approach to the task of investigating perceptions of intercultural communication within this particular

organisation. Furthermore, the researcher felt that the particular responses received following the feedback provided to the organisation supported the findings and strengthened the validity of the study.

Limitations of this study clearly lie in the limited population sample of only black and white male employees at middle managerial level in one organisation. The researcher acknowledges the wide cultural and linguistic diversity which characterises the South African workforce. The numerous research implications that have emerged from this study reflect the scope for research of this nature.

It is clear that there is a dire need for future research in intercultural communication in South African business organisations. The complexities that result from South Africa's diverse workforces "calls for" additional research. It is highly recommended that similar studies be conducted with females, to identify their perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace. Future research should also include investigations of the perceptions of additional cultural groups in South Africa (e.g. Indians, "Coloureds" and specific African groups), as well as individuals of varying ages, educational levels and occupational levels. It is also felt that individual observational case studies of employees communicating in a multicultural workplace would be extremely valuable and interesting. Although effective communication includes oral, listening and writing skills, this study did not investigate written communication between cultures. With recent advances in technology, intercultural communication via the Internet and e-mail is a field that is new, exciting and lacking in research.

Numerous theoretical and practical implications emerged from this study. In terms of theoretical implications, it is believed that the results of this study have added knowledge to the body of research on perceptions of intercultural communication in the South African workplace – an area which has been reported to be lacking in research and literature. It is believed that the results of this study have practical implications for improving intercultural communication of business organisations operating in South Africa. Based on the findings in this study, the need for further training and support was evident. The need to acknowledge that communication skills cannot be worked on in isolation was clear. It is strongly believed by the researcher that programmes that attempt to address intercultural communication by focusing purely on linguistic and paralinguistic aspects are ill-advised and underestimate the complexity of the situation. In addition, there is a danger that they

reinforce white ethnocentric attitudes and undermine the richness and values that different cultures have to offer.

Organisations need to accept the responsibility of training and educating their employees to be able to cope with intercultural interactions in the workplace. Through the implementation of appropriate training programmes which are based on implicit research and focus on facilitating good intercultural relations by targeting intercultural communication, this goal can be achieved.

“Effective communication is not a luxury which we can turn to once everything has been attended to and sorted out - it is the sorting out” (Steyn, 1993, pp.12).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information about Study for Participants

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Request For Participation In Study Investigating Intercultural Communication

I am currently a Masters student at the University of Cape Town, registered with the Division of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Department of Allied Health Sciences.

The research that I am involved in is focused on intercultural communication in the South African workplace. This is an extremely interesting and relevant area of research as good communication is an essential component of any successful business, but the diversity of languages and cultures in the South African workplace often poses many challenges to effective intercultural communication.

The main aim of the current study is to evaluate general and specific perceptions of black and white South African male employees regarding intercultural communication in the South African workplace. In particular, I am interested in investigating the perceptions of males aged 21 to 35 years of age who are employed at a middle managerial level within two South African business organisations.

The results obtained in this study will form part of a larger group of studies conducted by the Division of Communication Sciences and Disorders. The long-term goal of these studies is to contribute to the current knowledge base on intercultural communication by investigating perceptions of intercultural communication across both genders and a variety of racial and cultural groups within a variety of South African professional fields. This knowledge base will form the foundation for the development of appropriate and effective adult education programmes aimed at enhancing intercultural communication in South Africa.

The Division of Communication Sciences and Disorders would be extremely grateful if you would agree to participate in this study. Should you agree, you will be required to complete a questionnaire which will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. Questionnaire completion will occur at your place of employment, at a time to suit your convenience.

I assure you of complete confidentiality at all times; under no circumstances will your name appear in the research report or be mentioned elsewhere. You also have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, should you wish to terminate your participation. Should you require feedback of the results, a copy of the report will gladly be made available to you.

Your time and effort are much appreciated.
Yours sincerely

SHANNON BREWIS (MISS)
Researcher

DR DALE OGILVY
Research Supervisor

Appendix 2: Consent Form

DATE: _____

I, _____ (FULL NAME) am willing to participate in the above-mentioned research project on intercultural communication in the South African workplace.

I understand that full confidentiality is assured and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, should I wish to terminate my participation.

Signed:

PARTICIPANT_____
MISS SHANNON BREWIS

TEL: _____

E-MAIL: _____

Appendix 3: Biographical Information Form

1. FULL NAME: _____

2. WORK TEL: _____

3. E-MAIL: _____

4. JOB TITLE: _____

5. LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT AT OLD MUTUAL: _____ years _____ months

6. FIRST LANGUAGE: _____

SECOND LANGUAGE: _____

THIRD LANGUAGE: _____

OTHER LANGUAGES: _____

7. EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

8. PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE:

9. BRIEFLY STATE YOUR DAILY JOB RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES:

Appendix 4: Definitions of Communication Skills

The 20 communication skills that will be dealt with in this study are explained below. Please read through all definitions to reduce confusion when filling in the final table.

1. Greetings: what a person does and/or says on meeting you
2. Handshake the way in which a person shakes your hand
3. Rate of speech: how fast or slow a person's speech is
4. Loudness of speech: how loud or soft a person's speech is
5. Accent: the way in which a person produces the particular sounds of a language
6. Speech clarity: how clear a person's speech is. ie. how clearly they pronounce their words
7. Rhythm of speech: the 'flow' of a person's speech, which includes how they use pauses and hesitations
8. Organisation of content the logical sequencing of ideas/thoughts in conversation
9. Professional terminology: the way in which a person refers to appropriate professional words and terms
10. Listening skills: how a person listens and attends to what you are saying
11. Topic control how a person controls conversation topics
12. Turn-taking a person's understanding of when it is his turn to contribute to the conversation
13. Reaction to communication breakdown: what a person says or does when he does not understand you
14. Facial expression: the way in which a person uses his face to express himself during conversation
15. Body posture how a person stands/sits during conversation
16. Body space: how close a person stands/sits to you during conversation
17. Physical contact the way in which a person touches you or makes any other physical contact with you during conversation
18. Gestures: how a person uses hand and body movements to add to or explain what they are saying
19. Eye gaze: the way in which a person looks at you during conversation
20. Grooming: the way in which a person attends to his appearance

Appendix 5: Examples of Questions Included in Part Two Interviews

Part One rating scale	What problems, if any, did you experience when completing the rating scale for Part One of this study?
Perceptions of colleagues	• Tell me about your black/white colleagues' communication in general.
Perceptions of self	• Tell me about your own communication in general.
Training	• Do you feel that there is a need for training regarding cultural diversity and/or intercultural communication in this organisation? • Have you ever been involved in any training surrounding cultural diversity and/or intercultural training?

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