

**How to keep the *potjie* boiling:  
A sociolinguistic study of intercultural communication  
in a Cape Town workplace**

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Case Study.....	8
1.3 Methodology.....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Researching Intercultural Communication.....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.1 The Meaning of Culture.....	20
2.2 The Need for Intercultural Communication.....	24
2.3 Theories of Language in Interaction.....	27
2.3.1 Language and Power.....	28
2.3.2 Politeness and Face Theory.....	29
2.3.3 Language in Use.....	37
2.3.4 Accommodation Theory.....	40
2.3.5 Code-switching.....	42
2.4 Towards Intercultural Sensitivity: Training Approaches.....	44
2.5 Interactional Sociolinguistics.....	55
2.5.1 Preparing the Way.....	55
2.5.2 The Rise of Interactional Sociolinguistics.....	58
2.5.3 Concerns of Interactional Sociolinguistics.....	59
2.5.4 Methods of Interactional Sociolinguistic Research.....	68
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Business Structures.....</b>	<b>73</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	73
3.2 Communication.....	74
3.3 Organisational structures and designs.....	81
3.4 Managerial types.....	84
3.5 Corporate Culture.....	88

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Towards Successful Intercultural Business .....</b>	<b>93</b>
4.1 Introduction: Defining Success.....	93
4.2 Flexibility and the Future.....	96
4.3 Service.....	98
4.4 Organisational Structure.....	100
4.5 Quality Control Circles and Participation .....	102
4.6 Education and Training.....	106
4.7 Management .....	110
4.8 The Ubuntu Philosophy .....	113
4.9 Motivation.....	117
4.10 Communication.....	122
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: The Unity Forum.....</b>	<b>128</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	128
5.2 Language Choice .....	129
5.3 Terms of Address.....	136
5.4 Company Culture .....	139
5.5 Analysis of Language Use in Meetings .....	141
5.5.1 Planning .....	142
5.5.2 Explaining and Clarifying .....	151
5.5.3 Complaining .....	157
5.5.4 Contestation or Disagreement .....	162
5.5.5 Criticising .....	168
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>173</b>
6.1 Conclusion.....	173
6.2 Recommendations for Future Research.....	182
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>184</b>

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate intercultural communication in a South African business setting. After initial observations at various companies, a Cape Town construction firm was chosen as the subject of study. It was hypothesised that the communication at the firm was successful. Successful communication includes various aspects: messages are communicated effectively and accurately, members of the company are made to feel secure, valued and motivated and there is no sense of discrimination or disrespect. Data was gathered (a) at meetings of the labour committee which represents the workers and (b) at site visits. All recordings but one were made using a tape-recorder with a large microphone designed for group recordings. The final meeting was video-recorded so that communicative cues such as eye gaze, facial expressions and gestures could be analysed. Data gathered was in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa with regular code-switching and mixing. English was the language used most frequently in meetings and communication in English was the main focus of this research. Interesting uses and common functions of Xhosa and Afrikaans are also discussed. Additional information about the company studied was obtained from interviews, company documents and Webber's (1997) MBA thesis which looks closely at the company's participative processes.

Data was analysed in keeping with the concerns and methods of interactional sociolinguistics, a field which focuses on interaction between individuals. Brown & Levinson (1987) and Scollon & Scollon's (1995) models of politeness and face theory and Myers-Scotton's social functions of code-switching were also particularly useful. Other theories which were of value were Fairclough's (1989) notions of language and power and Giles (1975, 1981) and his colleagues in social psychology's speech accommodation theory.

A background to business terms and concepts is provided for readers from other disciplines. Organisational structures, management styles and corporate culture, including the philosophy of *ubuntu* ('community spirit') are discussed. These terms and concepts

are used to evaluate the success of the company and the role played by communication in this success.

Through a detailed analysis of the data gathered, the study reaches the conclusion that the company's intercultural communication is successful. It is clear that messages are, on the whole, communicated effectively: tasks are clearly explained and correctly carried out; misunderstandings are rare and usually cleared up early. An atmosphere of trust prevails which makes all members feel secure and motivated to give of their best.

# CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Every communicative interaction which takes place between people has the potential to fail. Various complications within the communicative event may lead, among other problems, to misunderstanding, negative evaluation of others, formation and reinforcement of stereotypes and perpetuation of power imbalances. In many instances the problems are or can be addressed by the interlocutors during their interaction. Their willingness to deal with misinterpretations and the differences between them as people can lead to successful communication. However, in many cases the interlocutors are unaware of the source of their miscommunication or do not wish to spend time rectifying these problems. In such cases communication almost invariably fails. By this I simply mean that the participants of discourse do not emerge with the same understanding of what took place, or with the same degree of satisfaction.

This type of communication breakdown can be harmful in business interactions when companies fail to reach or seal agreements which may be mutually advantageous because they do not understand each other clearly or correctly. Misunderstanding may be a result of language difficulty, for example if the dominant group determines the language to be used and effectively excludes others or limit their participation, or of mismatched cultural frames of interpretation. In gate-keeping encounters applicants may be judged on their proficiency in English or on their behaviour according to cultural norms which may not coincide with their own and be refused a position on these criteria. John Gumperz (1982b) has outlined a research paradigm that stresses the close and careful study of key sites of interaction between people from different linguistic backgrounds, e.g. job interviews, service encounters. One site that has not been studied much in South Africa, is the modern multicultural workplace. This study aims to fill this gap and to encourage further research into intercultural communication in business settings. Heugh (1995) claims that language is an important economic resource and is acknowledged as such in international language

planning discourse. However, outside this domain, English is seen as the only useful language for trade and for the workplace in many parts of the world and other languages are neglected in the workplace and their speakers discriminated against. Aside from problems mentioned above, this attitude can also jeopardise the safety of workers. For example, if factory workers are given instructions and safety warnings only in English and do not understand them, they are at great risk and the factory may lose workers, production time and profit.

This study aims to investigate the intercultural communication in a construction company in Cape Town, Cape Town Construction<sup>1</sup>. I have chosen the term 'intercultural communication' rather than 'cross-cultural' or 'transcultural communication' because it indicates members of different cultures communicating reciprocally in a group (*inter-*: 'between, among; mutually'). Both 'cross-cultural' and 'transcultural' imply boundaries which have to be crossed, differences which must be overcome, difficulties one must get beyond or to the other side of (*cross-*: denoting movement or position across something; passing from side to side, transverse; and *trans-*: across, beyond; on or to the other side of). *Cross* also appears in several expressions in English which suggest misunderstanding or conflict: *crossed wires*, *at cross purposes* and *crosstalk* 'unwanted transfer of signals between communication channels' (a name well-chosen for John Gumperz' video on miscommunication between cultures). The definitions are taken from the Concise Oxford Dictionary (eighth edition 1990).

Intercultural communication is of growing interest and importance in the world and in South Africa. Globalisation of business is making it a daily necessity to interact with people from around the world. Within South Africa major changes have been taking place over recent years which are increasing contact between different groups as all the cultures which have lived in isolation from one another come into contact in a variety of situations. As the rainbow nation develops, policies of segregation and separate development are

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed in the interests of confidentiality. This was not the choice of the company, but recommended by researchers in keeping with current practice in sociolinguistics.

discarded and replaced by a spirit of unity. At the same time technology is metaphorically shrinking the world, making it possible for people from around the globe to be in touch within seconds. Joseph Lo Bianco, an international expert on language and the economy, considers the concept of monolingual nation states 'dysfunctional' in the face of increasing internal diversity and globalisation, with its "economic interdependence, modern communication patterns, mobility and mass migration" (cited in Heugh 1995: 22). He argues that in the modern workplace team work, flexible competitive markets, multi-skilling of work, informality and negotiation are important. I would add intercultural sensitivity and communication skills to the list. These practices contrast with the classical model of organisations where workers formed part of a production line and performed isolated and fragmented tasks, structures were rigidly hierarchical and instructions were issued from above and obeyed. In the modern workplace structures are flatter and corporate culture and communication are valued. If organisations, and indeed society, are to accommodate cultural diversity, negotiation and participation; monolingualism no longer makes sense.

Agnihotri (1992: 46) compares South Africa and India, pointing out that "multilingual and multicultural environment; cultural heterogeneity and sociolinguistic variability in both countries is a way of life". He adds that South Africa could learn a great deal from India where "an increasingly participatory methodology for negotiating conflicts arising out of the varying interests of different pressure groups" has been developed (ibid.). Language is a significant element in such conflicts, because "[m]ost of our knowledge is acquired and transmitted through language. It is also an important tool of struggle for social justice and change" (Agnihotri 1992: 48).

I have chosen to examine only one business, using it as an in-depth case study, rather than attempting to make generalisations about limited findings in several businesses. My aim was to gain an understanding of the workings of one organisation by spending time talking to various members and observing their interactions. Observations took place in Unity Forum meetings, which will be described later in this chapter. My position at the

organisation was not quite participant observer, as I had no explicit function, but I became an accepted presence and could walk around, casually engaging with people with a degree of freedom I had not expected.

The reasons I chose this particular business are multiple<sup>2</sup>. Firstly, it houses a range of people from different cultures which necessitates intercultural interaction. This was a prerequisite for my study. In addition it was accessible and transparent, which made studying it a pleasure. I believe that the willingness of the company to allow me into meetings and onto sites has much to do with the company's success. Staff had nothing to fear from me; they did not perceive my questions or presence in their midst as threatening as they had nothing to hide. Management in particular, who ultimately hold the power to allow or refuse students like myself access to their company, were confident that I would be unable to unearth anything that would embarrass or incriminate them. In fact, I think they were fairly confident that I would find any information I uncovered about their company pleasing!

But why study a company which is successful and has very little to criticise? It seems to me that there is as much to be gained from investigating how a company became successful as there is from looking at the mistakes that have been made. That is not to say that this company made no mistakes, but they seemed to learn from them and take the lessons with them on their development journey to winning silver and gold in the National Productivity Awards in 1995 and 1996 respectively. It may even be that errors elsewhere are more clearly highlighted by seeing the way things could be made to work. Chapter Four defines success, judging Cape Town Construction (CTC) against various criteria. Webber (1997), in an MBA research project, compared two Cape Town construction companies in terms of worker participation and found the results that CTC achieved through its participative process very positive. The company seems to inspire people in the industry, so studying its

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<sup>2</sup> I considered a comparative study and contacted a number of companies ranging from Shell through Truworths to African Products. However, I soon realised that my exposure to each company would be limited if I tried to access too many and also saw that several companies were not eager to be observed and analysed.

success must have some value. I will argue that the success of the company is dependent on effective communication and an awareness and accommodation of one another's differences within the company.

Hindle (1998: 14) describes the present era in South Africa as follows, providing a context for this company's success: "It is the age of intense competition, business failure, buyouts, amalgamations and business re-engineering. It is also the beginning of the new South Africa with a new government that is involved in the formulation of new policies". Under such circumstances success is the exception rather than the rule and I think it is refreshing (for me and my readers) to encounter a success story for once. Here is an organisation which is using the 'disadvantage' of its internal cultural and linguistic mix as a resource, economic and interpersonal.

The cultural and linguistic mix includes blacks, coloureds and whites; Xhosa, English and Afrikaans speakers, all of whom are forced to interact in the work environment and have to find ways of communicating and working together effectively. Scholars cannot seem to agree on what constitutes a cultural or ethnic group. In social psychology, scholars have placed emphasis on self-identification and identification by others: members consider themselves to belong to a particular group *G* and are prepared to be treated and interpreted as *G*s. Actual behavioural patterns may change as long as group members continue to perceive the group as a unit to which they belong, i.e. so long as there is continuity. This view focuses on subjective criteria and does not rely on "notions of physical proximity or similarity between members" (Giles & Johnson 1981: 202). Language is often regarded as a criterion for belonging, partly because it is acquired and not inherited and therefore shows that an effort has been made to belong to the group. The Catalan Culture Committee holds its language very dear: "Our language, the expression of our people, which can never be given up, is the spiritual foundation of our existence... a people without a language of its own is only half a nation..." (cited in Giles & Johnson 1981: 204). Wiberg (1996) defines identity as that which makes an individual belong to various kinds of communities. He coins the term 'identity budget' for the several

dimensions of any person's identity. The dimensions include kinship, class, religion and language. Although the lines dividing different dialects of one language and those separating different languages may appear entirely arbitrary to linguists, they are of great symbolic importance to those who draw them. Language is a highly valued symbol of a shared past and of group solidarity.

At CTC (as in South Africa generally) race is perceived as a salient feature in determining group membership, most likely as a result of years of segregation and separate development under the *apartheid* government. At CTC language differences coincide with the division into coloured, white and black groups as each group identifies most strongly with one particular language - Afrikaans, English and Xhosa respectively. Observation confirmed that these are the three major cultural groups at the company: people identified themselves as members of one of these three groups. For example, on a site visit I was informed by Xhosa-speakers that although Gamat was coloured, he was 'a nice guy'. He was accepted by the Xhosa group, but his different cultural identity was noted. At lunch times members of each group usually sat together.

My approach in this study is interactional sociolinguistic: sociolinguistic because language and society, which are inextricably linked, are studied together here; interactional because my methodology is informed by the school of interactional sociolinguistics associated with John Gumperz and represented in South Africa principally by Keith Chick, Russell Kaschula and Elizabeth de Kadt. Schlegelhoff (1993: 47) argues for the study of the relationship between talk and social structure:

Both our casual and our studied examination of interaction and talk-in-interaction provide a lively sense of the occasions on which who the parties are relative to one another seems to matter and matter to them. And these include... their relative status, the power they differentially can command, the group affiliations they display or can have readily attributed to them such as their racial or ethnic memberships, their gender and age-grade status, their occupational status and its

general standing and immediate interactional significance, and the other categories of membership in the society which can matter to the participants and which fall under the traditional sociological rubric “social structure”.

However, my focus on business interactions is new and I believe that my data and conclusions could lead to a better understanding of intercultural communication in South African business.

This first chapter provides an introduction to the company and methodology used in this study. Chapter Two summarises the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches which have been used to examine intercultural communication in the sociolinguistic tradition. These include face theory, models of code-switching, language and power and accommodation theory, in addition to interactional sociolinguistics.

Chapter Three introduces important organisational terms and concepts, so that further discussion using these terms will be clear. Organisational structures and cultures are discussed, as well as management styles. Models of communication from business and linguistics are critically examined, showing a vast difference in the understanding of communicative functions between business writers and linguists. Chapter Four defines success and examines various features of CTC and their role in bringing the company success. Among these are good communication, education and training programmes, flexibility, management techniques and a unifying corporate culture.

Chapter Five includes a detailed analysis of language use and communicative strategies at Unity Forum meetings. The methods and theories described in Chapters One and Two were used in the analysis process. Chapter Six summarises findings from the data and offers conclusions and recommendations for future research and for the application of these findings in business.

## 1.2 The Case Study

*We stand for uncompromising commitment to quality, full-service construction excellence and skilful co-operation with all the parties involved in the projects we undertake. We unconditionally commit ourselves to our newly democratised country and all its people.*

*The key to achieving our company goals rests on the calibre of the people we employ and the opportunities for education and self-fulfilment we provide.*

Cape Town Construction (Pty) Ltd. is a medium-sized building construction company based in Cape Town. Until recently the company operated only in the Western Cape, but over the past three years, projects have been successfully completed in Durban. The company specialises in industrial projects, with retail, commercial and residential projects following in order of preference. Projects undertaken range from R2 million to R25 million depending on the nature of the project. The average company turnover per annum is approximately R80 to R90 million (Webber 1997: 124).

The majority of their work is negotiated, as opposed to the usual method of procuring work through tenders. This method of procurement is known as 'turnkey'. It provides the client with a far more comprehensive service and is more proactive. The contractors find the land, organise finance, design and erect the building, requiring only a brief from clients and consultation with them once land has been chosen, plans drawn and so on. The client has no responsibility for finding an architect, quantity surveyor etc. In addition, the contractors take full responsibility for costs incurred after the price has been agreed on, unless the client makes changes after the process has begun. The contractor also undertakes to deliver quality work on time. In the tender system, contractors are awarded contracts on the lowest bid, they are forced to work with architects, engineers and materials that may not be of the best quality and their time pressures are extreme. The contractors benefit from turnkey because they choose their staff and their materials, and they have more power in choosing their price. Communication is easier because all parties are in regular contact and no outsiders have to be kept up to date or consulted at every step and paperwork is kept down. The contractors also have greater independence

because they can seek work, rather than waiting for contracts to be put out to tender, and they are more likely to get repeat work. This may mean that they are less affected by changes in the economy, because clients feel more secure when one company has taken all responsibility and may still build in difficult times. Tenders are frequently withdrawn or projects cancelled at such times.

Cape Town Construction (CTC) employs a total of about 175 core wage earners. These workers vary from general worker to artisan leading hand. During peak times it may be necessary to increase the work force to double that number. The salaried staff number around 50 including senior managers and directors. The company is owned and directed by five people. Marais is the managing director. He founded the company in 1985. The other directors are Webb, human resources director, a quantity surveyor who brought 28 years of experience in the building industry when he joined the company in 1990, two contracts managers each with 22 years of experience, and the financial director. All the directors are white males between the ages of 35 and 58 years. One of the six is Afrikaans-speaking while the rest have English as their home language. The rest of the workforce is drawn from Cape Town's diverse population.

CTC consider their people their most valuable resource. The company prioritises the development of staff and their expertise. This priority applies equally to literacy, basic skills, education and training. The directors seem pleased with this investment, knowing that it has its rewards. Their views are expressed in the company brochure: "Employee advancement, improved productivity and profitability and a stable and committed staff are our rewards for this investment in our business. Cost effectiveness and quality of workmanship are our clients' rewards".

The company's mission statement shows a clear commitment to its people and its clients. The importance of human resources is emphasised by Mokoatle (1977: 151): "Manpower is the intangible wealth of a nation - its most important resource." He adds that

management should concern itself with people, as they are the resource which converts all other resources to profitable commodities.

“A move to improve productivity began in June 1990 with the objective of building a relationship of trust by improving communication and encouraging interaction between the workforce and management. Providing job security and a career path for all employees was seen as the foundation of the productivity improvement drive” (Cape Town Construction’s Entry for National Productivity Awards 1996: 4) Unfortunately, not long after this process was set in action, a major recession hit South Africa and everything that did not contribute directly to production, was shelved. The workforce (including salaried staff) was trimmed to the bare minimum and worked hard at any available job.

In 1992 conditions started improving and the change process was restarted, this time with a much smaller workforce who knew what it was about. This made the initiative intended to make the company more stable and competitive much easier. Preceding these changes, the company was fairly competitive and profitable, but “operated well below its potential” (Webber 1997:125). There were problems with communication between management and workers, trust was low and there was a large trade union presence. Wage earners had no upward career opportunities and little, if any, job security. They were also excluded from all decision-making and planning, which led to a lack of loyalty and commitment to the company and their jobs. Monitoring, measurement and feedback on work produced were limited and problems were noted only in the monthly cost report, 30 days too late.

Meanwhile South Africa was facing a recession, high inflation, lack of foreign investment and industrial unrest. In addition the political climate was unstable and causing uncertainty. It seemed essential to change the company and improve its prospects for the future. It is significant that CTC had the foresight to realise that changes would have to be made if they were to survive in the future. They did not wait for a disaster before they woke to the need for change; they planned ahead.

A set of objectives for the change process was agreed upon. Webber (1997: 126) cites these in his study of the company's participatory process:

1. Change the company culture to one of participation.
2. Create a common vision.
3. Develop effective participation.
4. Introduce effective communication and communication systems.
5. Develop a sense of pride and belonging.
6. Enhance job security.
7. Develop effective productivity measurement and cost control systems.
8. Improve productivity and product quality.
9. Establish a high level of trust and maintain this through interactive participation.

These steps were taken entirely by management, as it was thought that management needed to initiate change in order to facilitate participation by all stakeholders in the future. Deming (1982: 16) believes that "Quality is everybody's job, but quality must be led by management." He recommends 14 points for top management to institute in order to improve quality and thereby productivity. He feels strongly that these points can only be instituted by top management (i.e. those who do not need authorisation from anyone else to perform these tasks) and that it is their responsibility to do so. Once particular improvements have been made, it is possible for all members of an organisation to perform at their peak and achieve the best possible results.

The starting point of the process, was to establish an incentive which would motivate workers to participate in company life and on which further steps could build. The incentive chosen was job security and along with that, a reasonable career path within the company for all workers. This sounds easier than it is in the fluctuating market of construction, which is sensitive to any change in the economy. However, CTC committed to achieving this incentive and changed their procurement strategies to make it possible. Turnkey stabilised the cyclical nature of work in the construction industry to some extent

by making it possible for the company to seek work when no tenders were coming out. This meant that there was more work and the company had greater control over the type of work. Workers became accustomed to hanging the same door in all their buildings and working according to the same specifications. There were not constantly new quantity surveyors with their own rules. This meant that general workers could get to know the system and increase their own role and responsibility within it. They could climb a career path if they chose because the opportunity was open to them.

Once the incentive was in place, a culture had to be created within which the other objectives (points 1 to 9 above) could be implemented. Cornerstones of the culture were to be participation, trust and training. These were intended to break down the barriers between different groups in the company and make all workers feel comfortable enough to speak their minds. Training focused on the change process and how to become a part of it. The 6M training course was also initiated, teaching every member of the organisation how business works. (This took about three months.). The six M's are Management, Men<sup>3</sup>, Machinery, Materials, Market and Money.

During this time, the *Jika* system was instituted. The system drew inspiration from the Nissan Green Areas and the Japanese concept of Quality Control Circles. The term *jika* is a Xhosa word which means 'to turn around'. It was chosen by workers as they saw daily *Jika* meetings as 'turning around' the previous day's work very quickly (rather than waiting to hear of mistakes at the end of the month). As part of the *Jika* system, each site was equipped with a *Jika* hut where meetings take place each morning. Each worker has a locker in this hut, and there are noticeboards, clothes hooks, tables and benches. The hut also serves as a rest room during tea and lunch times. In addition, each worker's *Jika* card is displayed. The *Jika* card is a visual means of communicating and bears the worker's name, skill and photograph. Attendance is marked off in green, as is target for the day. Absence from the site or failure to achieve the day's target are marked in red. This means

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<sup>3</sup> The female workers at CTC tend to hold administrative or office posts rather than construction jobs, although attempts are being made to change this. There was only one woman among my subjects for this study and gender has not been specifically addressed.

that employees know what every other worker on the site is doing and they can encourage or chastise one another. This peer pressure has proved very effective and has sparked team spirit and competitiveness among teams.

In 1993 the Unity Forum came into being. This is a committee elected by all members of the company to address issues relating to labour, wages, bonuses, retrenchment, company policies, health and safety among others. Meetings take place once a month and are chaired by an employee. Once a year the Unity Forum members go away for a weekend to discuss important issues and look at the future of the company. This body is vital in the communication network of the company. It allows management and workers to communicate freely and to share concerns and grievances with one another. Management is able to ask workers for their support when they are forced to go out to tender<sup>4</sup> and have to build for an extremely low price (the only way to win a tender) in very limited time. Workers know the alternative is reduced pay or even retrenchment of some of their number. They are aware of the pressures in the market and the shortage of work. In turn they can share with management their concerns about pay and holidays and pressures on them on site. They expect to be heard and action to be taken. It is very unusual to find a company in the construction industry that is not unionised; the Unity Forum is a major part of what made this possible.

The transformation which took place at Capé Town Construction brought results such as improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, increased bonuses paid to workers and larger profits for shareholders, and productivity and safety awards. However, Webber (1997: 151-152) believes that improvements can still be made at Cape Town Construction. In the mean time their efforts are an example to others and worthy of our attention.

In conclusion, employers, unions and workers in the Western Cape Building Industry will have to summon up every inch of strength to develop the necessary climate of trust for Workplace Forums as well as the other forms of participation

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<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to entirely preclude the tender process as a method of procurement although it is not the company's preferred method. When work is scarce they have to resort to what is available.

to be effective. This will require a quantum leap of faith from both sides. If the benefits of engagement can be identified and pursued with a new spirit of openness and goodwill, both management and workers with their unions can rise above the immediate obstacles to achieve their objective.

### **1.3 Methodology**

My methods in doing this study were not always as expected. I had anticipated working at the company headquarters and gaining insider status, but this proved considerably more difficult than I had imagined. I was not quite a participant observer at Cape Town Construction, but spent a fair amount of time at the company. In the end this counted in my favour because workers did not feel that I was reporting to 'the boss' and commented openly on various aspects of their work lives.

However, there were several steps which had to be taken before I started interacting with the workers. Before even contacting the company, a research question or hypothesis had to be devised. Reaching this stage proved to be a difficult and time-consuming task. I had not realised that choosing a topic was such a large part of the thesis process. Months of reading, discussion and interviews seemed to be a waste of time, as nothing substantial was written in that time. As I discarded information which did not relate to a particular issue and gave up on companies who were reluctant to allow me access to their interactions, the focus of my research became clearer. I began to see patterns in the material I had selected and decided to pursue those. Eventually I settled on using only one company for a detailed case study and examining the success of that company's intercultural communication. When I reached this point, the task seemed much more manageable and I began with new fervour.

Gumperz (1971) believes that the sociolinguist must employ all the methods of the ethnographer in order to discover the rules which underlie linguistic practices. According to the interactionist model these practices are determined by social categories and social

relationships. It is therefore not enough to simply observe behaviour and perhaps correlate it with economic or ethnic indicators, we must look for an explanation in terms of social relationships etc. This can be done through participant observation, preferably by living in the community for some time. Tape recording natural conversation is also a very important way to capture data. The analyst can test her understanding of the cultural norms at work by giving her interpretation of underlying motivations and comparing these with the explanations of the speakers themselves and of members of the community.

I did not make use of this cross-checking practice as there was little doubt as to intentions because they were so clearly and extensively discussed in the meetings themselves. Some examples of the type of clarification that occurred in meetings will be closely examined in the analysis section of Chapter Five.

The data gathering stage also involved more specific reading and interviewing, this time focusing only on books, articles and questions which related to my research question. The data base used for analysis was gathered at Unity Forum meetings at Cape Town Construction (see previous section). One of these meetings was tape recorded, another video recorded and field notes were taken at two meetings. My first attempt at taking field notes was not entirely successful as I focused on content more than necessary, leaving too little time to make sufficient notes about paralinguistic cues. As a result some of the notes were not very useful, but they did contain some verbatim transcriptions and notes about the functions for which each of the three languages was used.

The tape recording was done using a large tape recorder designed to handle large groups. The sound quality was excellent and all of the eighteen speakers could be heard and identified, regardless of their distance from the tape recorder in the meeting. The video recorder was a small portable machine which took 8mm tapes and could be easily carried around the meetings room. The sound quality on the video was reasonably good if turned up high.

Transcription was the next major task. Transcribing audio recordings seemed simple in comparison to the video recording, but both were very time consuming. The video had to be played on an ordinary machine and transcriptions were done in between manual stops and starts. A further complication was the visual data which had to be noted as well. The audio tape transcriptions seemed a great deal easier although I did not use a transcriber for all of them. Having attended all the meetings I was using in my data base, I knew what the atmosphere had been like and could recognise voices and often remember gestures. This made the task of transcription a great deal easier. I do not recommend ever trying to do transcriptions of large groups if you were not present at the recording session.

The transcription conventions used are based on a combination of Gumperz (1982b) and Parker (1992). Indications of pauses, overlaps and unintelligible words are taken from Gumperz (1982b):

.. speech pause

... long speech pause

[ conversational overlap

]

( ) unintelligible word

Parker (1992) provided additional conventions which proved useful for this data:

Empty square brackets indicate an intentional omission by the author: [ ]. Square brackets are also used around information provided for the reader, for example explaining movements: [waving his right hand]. Indications of assent, backchannelling and laughter are placed between slashes: /mm/.

In addition I have used accepted linguistic conventions (as indicated in Lass 1992) for showing emphasis, cited words and sentences etc.: emphasis underlined, foreign words in *italics*, glosses in 'single commas', words cited in *italics*, sentences cited in 'single commas' and 'single commas' for concepts being discussed. Finding ways to make all the necessary differentiations was not as obvious as it may seem. One does not want to use

too many different fonts or sizes, because every page begins to look like fruit salad; however, neglecting to indicate cited words can lead to incongruous sentences. I hope that this information will be useful for future researchers.

The most difficult part of producing this thesis came next: analysing the data. I completed my reading and wrote up the theory chapters before sitting down with the transcripts and field notes from Unity Forum meetings and site interviews. Stubbs (1983) suggests discussing the functions which language fills in different situations. He believes that it is commonly falsely assumed that language fulfils only (or at least chiefly) two functions: referring to the world and communicating explicit messages (a referential function), and expressing feelings (an emotive function). "It is now something of a commonplace in sociolinguistics to say that language can have many functions" (Stubbs 1983: 45). These functions may include planning, maintaining social relationships, releasing tension, measuring time, criticising or simply filling embarrassing silences. Even brief utterances may have more than one function, for example asking a question can also be a criticism: "Where are the provident fund slips?" requests information but also may imply that the slips should have been available and are not, thus criticising the hearer. The functions of language are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

I attempted to sort the data into functional categories but found this more difficult than expected. Language is used for a variety of functions and its use has a variety of consequences. The same phenomenon can be described in a number of different ways and finding the most appropriate way was not easy. In addition speech act theory and ethnomethodology both place emphasis on speech as action, which forces interactional sociolinguists (whose field encompasses speech act theory and ethnomethodology) towards a social perspective of language; the social context must be taken into account. Potter & Wetherell (1987: 14) comment on the social nature of discourse analysis:

In contrast to the Chomskian tradition, then, discourse analysis has embraced performance in data in all its messy and ungrammatical complexity. ... As a result it has had to face up to the fact that language is not an abstract realm. Out there in

the real world it is made up from particular utterances performed in particular contexts. Moreover, discourse becomes placed firmly in the arena of social behaviour.

Gradually categories began to emerge from the data which seemed useful and reasonable and which I could justify selecting from among the possibilities. These categories became the subheadings in section 5.4.

Schlegelhoff (1993: 66) insists that a researcher's intuitions must be defensible, backed up by hard evidence in the data. In addition he cautions researchers against categorising people according to features which may not be relevant to a particular interaction. He believes that any person who can be categorised as Jewish or male, also belongs to other groups and all these identities are not equally relevant to every interaction. Contexts too must be relevant if they are to be described as background to analysis. To say that an encounter took place in a hospital does not necessarily add value. It may be more pertinent to point out the time of day or the political conditions. "In brief, the issue is to convert insistent intuition, however correct, into empirically detailed analysis" (1993: 66). Schlegelhoff encourages his readers to find reasons for their intuitions in their data and defend them in their analysis so that stereotypes are not blindly perpetuated and standard labels are not unthinkingly applied.

This discussion of methodology dwells on many of the messy aspects of producing a work such as this. It is acknowledged by professionals in the field of discourse analysis that there is a lack of "recognized and accepted procedures for collecting, presenting and analysing conversational data" (Stubbs 1983: 219). As a result, I felt it would be valuable to outline the methods used in as much detail as possible, emphasising difficulties experienced. It is hoped that future researchers will find this discussion helpful and heartening when hurdles in the research process seem insurmountable. It is intended to serve as a reminder that all research can be messy and difficult at times and going through

moments of utter despair is part of the experience. Stubbs' (1983: 246) conclusion provided me with some inspiration in times of trouble:

Books appear tidily packaged, as this one is, between introductions and conclusions, and provided with titles, section headings, references, cross-references, footnotes, and quotes from eminent scholars. Behind such books lie the untidy aspects of research: informants who never turned up, drawers full of collected but unused (unusable?) data, and days spent writing chapters on methodology to put off collecting data and analysing it.

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## CHAPTER TWO: Researching Intercultural Communication

### 2.1 The Meaning of Culture

Before embarking on a discussion of intercultural communication and the concerns and methods of those who have studied it, it would perhaps be appropriate to examine the concept of culture. The term has been much heard, particularly in recent years, and has its own flavour wherever it is used. In South Africa there are overtones which would not exist in other parts of the world. Much of this is the legacy of apartheid which kept people separate, forcing them to develop in different directions. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) lists a series of definitions of this term. Three of these are worth repeating here:

1. the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively
2. the customs, civilisation, and achievements of a particular time or people
3. improvement by mental or physical training

The second probably comes closest to capturing the meaning I intend, but it is interesting to note that the other two suggest that gaining culture is an 'improvement' or shows 'human intellectual achievement'. If two people from different cultures meet, each may think the other could benefit from 'acquiring some culture' as it may be difficult to perceive the culture of another as a culture at all. Each may feel that they have achieved a particular level of intellectual sophistication which the other lacks.

However, "[c]ulture is a fuzzy construct" (Tower, Kelly & Richards 1997: 323) and definitions focusing on various aspects of it have been proposed by scholars from many disciplines. Dimensions of culture and cultural difference which have been studied include the variation from individualism to collectivism, socialisation, cultural universals and cultural unity and diversity<sup>1</sup>. Williams (1989) describes the development of the term

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Giddens (1989), McClelland (1976), Williams (1987), Jackson (1993) and Scollon & Scollon (1995).

'culture' in English from the fifteenth century. In the eighteenth century Herder, a German philosopher, commented as follows on the word (which had been taken up in German as 'Kultur'): "nothing is more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods" (cited in Williams 1989: 89). Herder argues for the use of 'cultures' in the plural to indicate the specific and variable cultures of different groups. Williams (1989: 90) proceeds to giving three modern definitions of culture:

- (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development
- (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general
- (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity

The first and third of these are similar to the definitions in the Concise Oxford, but the middle description of culture resembles sociological definitions and comes much closer to the meaning intended here.

The classic definition of culture is something like "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society" (Tyler cited in Jackson 1993: 151) or "the expression of a relatively organized system of shared meanings which members of that culture attribute to the persons and objects which make up the culture" (Rohner cited in Tower, Kelly & Richards 1997: 323). The second of these adds a subjective dimension to the definition of culture, suggesting that members themselves decide who or what is included and excluded in their cultural group and practices.

Williams et al. (cited in Jackson 1993: 151) apply their definition of culture to organisations: "culture is the commonly held and relatively stable beliefs, attitudes and values that exist within the organisation". This definition brings corporate culture very

close to national or social culture. This discussion is therefore also relevant to the next chapter which discusses organisations, their structures, and the cultures which exist within them. The sociological definition which Giddens (1989: 31) provides, again shows that a clear definition of culture can apply to any group: “Culture consists of the **values** the members of a given group hold, the **norms** they follow, and the *material goods* they create. ...Culture refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society.” This definition includes the way members of a society dress, their family life, patterns of work, religion, leisure pursuits. It also covers the goods they create which become meaningful for them: weapons, tools and implements, books, art, dwellings. In organisations, artefacts are a very important marker of the corporate culture. Smith (1981: 216) cites Sukwivat who defines culture as “an intertwined system of values, attitudes, beliefs and norms that give meaning and significance to both individual and collective identity.” Here again, it is not only what is shared but also the meaning it carries which is important.

Giddens makes the important point that each culture has its own unique patterns of behaviour which may seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds, and yet seem entirely natural to members of that particular culture. He adds that “The diversity of human culture is remarkable. Values and norms of behaviour vary widely from culture to culture, often contrasting in a radical way with what people from Western societies consider ‘normal’” (Giddens 1989: 37). Believing that one’s own culture is natural and others somehow ‘different’ or even deviant, is a dangerous trap to fall into and will lead to uncomfortable intercultural relations. This issue will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Some authors from the field of management and organisational communication have cast definitions of culture for their own purposes. As workplaces become increasingly diverse and different groups have to work together, learning about other cultures is gaining priority. Smit & Cronje (1992: 458) cite the following definition in their book entitled Management Principles: “Culture is a complex environmental influence and can be defined as the sum total of the way of life of a group of people. As a member of a specific

community, an individual accepts the culture of his [sic] community, that is he acquires the language, values, faith, knowledge, laws and customs of his community.” Fielding’s definition (1993: 40) is similar, but contains a reminder of the subjectivity of our classifications: “A culture may be defined as a system of beliefs, assumptions and values shared by a group of people. These people will also share a set of symbolic codes, for example a language. ... This group of people will also share a view of themselves and the world.” Adey & Andrew (1990) include a discussion of cross-cultural communication in their guide to communication for managers. Their definition of culture overlaps with those discussed above and includes shared norms, mores (manners and morals), beliefs, values, attitudes, ideas, customs and symbols. They point out that this complex pattern of behaviour is common only to a certain extent to members of a particular group. They add that culture can be described as a way of life.

I found it interesting that business people who dealt with other cultures knew that there was something different about the ‘others’, but found it very difficult to describe. When interviewing management representatives of the clothing firm Truworhs, I discovered that they had great difficulty in defining culture and particularly in describing differences noted in other cultural groups. From their experiences in Africa and the Middle East, they made some comments about women’s clothing, about women not being allowed to work, and about people not seeming trustworthy in relationships or in business in the Middle East. One of the representatives voiced the impression that many people in the Middle East were hypocritical: traditional by day, wild by night. Two commented on language, saying that it was only a small part of the problem in their cross-cultural encounters (personal communication: June 1998).

Linda Human, a diversity management specialist in South Africa, feels that the kind of definition proposed by Degenaar (cited in Human 1996: 51) is preferable to others in the quest for intercultural understanding:

Culture is a controversial term ...(but)... we define culture as the form of life or the life-style of a community. A community refers to any group of people who

have certain characteristics in common... for example, sharing of a place, a common ancestry, language ...etc. But also the sharing of certain interests (scholars, artists, nature lovers, sportsmen, homosexuals etc.).

According to this definition, most individuals belong to a number of cultures, with national or ethnic culture as only one part of their identity. When examining the communication between different cultural groups at Cape Town Construction, other factors which impact on an individual's identity will be considered along with culture. Among these could be upbringing and parents' aspirations for their children, emphasis on conformity or individuality, education and the philosophies of different schools, socio-economic factors, gender, age etc..

My aim is not to dwell on these definitions of culture and the problems they carry with them, but rather to move on to the issue of intercultural communication: what happens when people from different cultural groups have to interact and how such interactions are complicated by a stressful work environment.

## 2.2 The Need for Intercultural Communication

The qualities which are considered to make people more desirable as employees, may differ radically from culture to culture. In South Africa it is still fairly obvious that white middle class norms are seen as the standard to emulate. As in other parts of the world, (previously) marginalised groups such as blacks and women were expected to learn these norms and fit in with them (or try to change them<sup>2</sup>). There is now a movement to change this attitude, with members of the dominant white group (no longer politically in power, but still holding a great deal of economic control) learning about 'other' groups and their cultures, focusing on norms of communication and behaviour. In the current age of workshops and understanding diversity, black culture is invariably explained to whites so

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cameron (1995) discusses the need for oppressed groups to fight against the language which deprives them of rights and power.

that they will be better equipped to communicate with their black colleagues and employees. It is very rare that white culture is explained to anyone; perhaps because it is still seen as self-explanatory and obvious. It is perceived as making sense by those in power, so it is not explained to others. Giddens (1989) warns of the tendency to see one's own culture as 'natural' and expecting all others to understand it. Bennett (1993) describes this as denial, a type of ethnocentricity.

Another danger of workshops and consultants, is that cultures are generalised and members of those cultures are stereotyped. The generalisations are intended to give outsiders a understanding of a group and help them communicate more effectively. The result is, however, that people are not treated as individuals but as specimens or representatives of a group. 'Black Xhosa culture' will not necessarily apply to every person whose skin is dark and who happens to have command of the Xhosa language. White people, particularly in the 'old' South Africa tended to treat all the blacks they met in the same way, ignoring important social factors such as age, sex and position. "Respect for age is one of the pillars of Black society" and "females are not given equality with males" so white norms are often quite inappropriate (Gowlett 1986: 5). In addition most white South Africans are not familiar with the African languages spoken here, so they are usually not in a position to tell a Xhosa speaker from a Sotho speaker. This may lead to further confusion or embarrassment, as they may use their one African greeting or phrase with every black person they meet.

It is ironic that the more people in business (and other spheres) attempt to learn about each other, the more they become trapped in rigid patterns of stereotype. They therefore treat each person from a particular culture in the same way, instead of treating people as individuals and responding to everyone according to who they are and what they say (rather than what they are expected to be and say). This is illustrated in the following brief anecdote: My family lived for while in Bophutatswana when I was a child. My parents became good friends with a black couple who were very prominent in public life, and who, more importantly for them, had children around my age. We frequently had supper

together at their house or ours. On one occasion, white South African friends of ours were inviting the couple to their house for a more formal dinner party, possibly something government related. The hostess telephoned my mother and asked her "What do they eat?" I am not certain how my mother responded, but she subsequently remarked, "I can't believe she asked me that! As if they're grasshoppers and eat only one thing!"

The importance of intercultural communication is made clear by Parker (1996) who addresses globalisation and the effect it is having on businesses throughout the world today. She argues that all business is affected by globalisation, although not all businesses are global. A global enterprise is one which can be said to have a "world-wide presence" (Parker 1996: 490). In other words, it is essential for all businesses to have access to the new global market and to make themselves acceptable, or preferably desirable to the consumers in that market. This entails transcending a number of barriers (ibid.):

The global enterprise may ... be described according to its ability to transcend existing boundaries of three kinds. First, global enterprises cross external boundaries of nations, space and time, or responsibilities that are in some sense measurable. Second, less tangible boundaries like culture, thought, or the relationship between self (organization) and others must also be crossed if global opportunities are to be reached. Third, some boundaries internal to the global organization have to be bridged, including vertical and horizontal barriers, those pertaining to task or rank, and even more amorphous barriers like attitude. The importance of breaking down boundaries between departments, shifting hierarchical to contractual management, and sharing values to successful global activity was noted long ago ...

This implies that business, in South Africa as elsewhere must learn the art of intercultural communication in order to succeed on a large scale.

### 2.3 Theories of Language in Interaction

Many authors have written about the role language plays in culture and in the construction of social relations. This emphasis was not always present in linguistics, and some schools (such as generative grammar) still separate language and society entirely. In anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics, the links between language and society, and language and culture have always been stressed. The focus on interaction between cultures, though, is relatively new. Gumperz (1982b) points out that people have always seen language as being part of culture; as something which distinguishes groups of people, along with other shared practices. In the nineteenth century in particular, language was part of what legitimised the nation states of central and Western Europe. People who shared a linguistic identity were seen as a unit which could easily be called a nation.

Saville-Troike (1993), an ethnographer of communication, discusses the dynamic relationship between language and society from such a vantage point. She shows the relationship to be reciprocal, with language and society each constituting and being constituted by the other (Saville-Troike 1993: 35):

The role of language is not the same in all societies, but it often includes the marking of social categories, the maintenance and manipulation of individual social relationships and networks, and various means of effecting social control.

The relationship is not static, but varying and constitutive in nature. Social categories are primarily a part of the social system, but also become embedded in the language system as it is used to mark them; the use and valuation of the linguistic markers in turn may affect the nature and persistence of the categories themselves.

Various theoretical frameworks have something to offer the field of intercultural communication. This chapter will look at issues of language and power, politeness, accommodation and code-switching in addition to the major focus of interactional sociolinguistics.

### 2.3.1 Language and Power

Norman Fairclough (1989), a leader in the field of critical linguistics, discusses discourse and power from two perspectives: power in discourse and power behind discourse. Power in discourse refers to discourse as a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted. Power behind discourse refers to discourse as shaped or constituted by relations of power. Such relations, for example, are essential to understanding the issue of standard vs. non-standard language. However, Fairclough (1989: 43) stresses that power is negotiated and not constant: “power, whether it be ‘in’ or ‘behind’ discourse, is never definitely held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost.”

Power in discourse has to do with powerful participants controlling the contributions of other participants. Powerful participants are also able to select the discourse type, but are also constrained by it to some extent. So too are other participants, as everyone has to adhere to the conventions of the chosen discourse. The chosen conventions are particularly problematic when non-powerful participants are unaware of, or unfamiliar with them, as frequently occurs in intercultural interactions.

In ‘gatekeeping encounters’ such as job interviews, where power is unequally distributed, the interviewee may be disadvantaged purely by belonging to a cultural group different from that of the interviewer(s). The applicant may be negatively evaluated and therefore lose the potential job as a result of poor understanding between the participants in the interaction, rather than due to a lack of knowledge, qualifications or experience. Many social goods (see also Bourdieu 1991) are denied those who do not belong to the dominant culture in such encounters. Language and culturally different *modi operandi* can be used in this way as an excuse for racism and discrimination.

When a particular language or linguistic variety has become associated with power, other dialects may become stigmatised and the speakers of these varieties may be evaluated as “vulgar, slovenly, low, barbarous” and so forth (Fairclough 1989: 57). This is a result of

power behind discourse. A powerful variety, through its association with powerful cultural and political institutions, is taken up by those in power. As a result it usually becomes a class dialect and therefore a source of power for the class who uses it. Bourdieu (1977) refers to this as 'cultural capital'. The ruling classes have greater cultural capital than other members of the society because they have access to the dominant discourse.

Bourdieu is critical of the 'interactionist' approach because it reduces relations of power to relations of communication. Communication always entails an element of power, but power relations stretch wider than communication. "[R]elations of communication are always, inseparably, power relations which, in form and content, depend on material or symbolic power accumulated by the agents (or institutions) involved in these relations and which ... can enable symbolic power to be accumulated" (Bourdieu 1991: 167).

Struggles in discourse may be seen to operate at three levels: situational, institutional and social struggle. Fighting for power in a conversation is not an isolated event; it impacts on the roles and status of the participants in the rest of their lives too. It may even affect others like them; i.e. have greater currency or relevance (Fairclough 1989: 70). For example, a black person interviewed by a white, may see a refusal of the job as a racial issue. The white may also refuse the black because his/her speech style, response to questions and discourse conventions are perceived as typical, arrogant, cheeky. These negative evaluations feed back into society, perpetuating racial acrimony and inequality.

### **2.3.2 Politeness and Face Theory**

Politeness and degrees of formality are interlinked and work together to smooth social relations. Particular strategies may be used to signal to listeners that speakers value them in some way, or that speakers know that they expect to be treated in a particular way, or perhaps speakers treat them differently from their peers to show respect or gain favour. Therefore, politeness and the degree of formality selected are clearly of major importance in all interactions. Particularly where interlocutors have an unequal power relationship, care must be taken not to alienate or offend subordinates, clients or managers. Treating

each person in the same manner is considered by some to be the solution, while others prefer to grade their signs of respect according to various factors such as age, status and relationship.

**Liza:** [to Pickering] Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me. And there were a hundred little things you never noticed, because they came naturally to you. Things about standing up and taking off your hat and opening doors -

**Pickering:** Oh, that was nothing.

**Liza:** Yes: things that shewed<sup>3</sup> you thought and felt about me as if I were something better than a scullery-maid; though of course you would have been just the same to the scullery-maid if she had been let into the drawing room.

...

**Higgins:** ...I cant change my nature; and I dont intend to change my manners. My manners are exactly the same as Colonel Pickering's.

**Liza:** Thats not true. He treats a flower girl as if she was a duchess.

**Higgins:** And I treat a duchess as if she was a flower girl.

...

**Higgins:** The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.

In the quote above from Pygmalion, two extreme positions are beautifully illustrated: Colonel Pickering treats those he meets according to the social circumstances, usually erring on the side of chivalry, while Professor Higgins treats everyone in the same off-hand, careless manner.

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<sup>3</sup> Spelling conventions from the text were preserved in this citation: There are no apostrophes and 'showed' is rendered 'shewed' (Shaw 1971: 127, 131-132).

Politeness and formality are generally based on the recognition of social factors such as differences in power and degrees of social distance and are oriented to reproducing these without change (Brown & Levinson 1987). Formality increases the constraints on the participants in several ways: content should be highly relevant, relations or roles are clearly defined and turn-taking follows strict rules. Particular vocabulary and grammar have to be used in certain situations and the level of usage must remain consistent. This requires participants to acquire a fair amount of skill, so that they know which structures are appropriate to a situation and how to use them (see Fairclough 1989). Saville-Troike (1993) includes this kind of knowledge under Hymes' concept of 'communicative competence'. This term is discussed and more explicitly defined later in this chapter.

In particularly formal settings, the interaction has to be played out almost according to a formula, at a particular speed and volume, in a given order and around limited subjects. Business meetings, for example, are often rigidly structured and proceed according to a plan laid out in the agenda. A chairperson monitors turns and decides who is allowed to speak and when; in some cases those present at the meeting have to raise their hands to bid for a speaking turn. The kind of language used is usually also somewhat different from ordinary speech - particular formulaic expressions may be used; speakers have to be polite and respectful, taking into account the face needs of others present regardless of their relative social status; one person may not dominate the floor and so on.

According to Ervin-Tripp (1972) socio-cultural settings determine choices among forms of address, lexical items, request structures and so on. These choices in turn bring certain co-occurrence rules into force. Once we become accustomed to these rules, speech behaviour which deviates from them is seen as marked and therefore calls attention to its social significance. For example, addressing the judge as "Yo, Dude!" would be very striking in a courtroom situation as it violates rules of formality and the expected co-occurrence rules. Co-occurrence rules apply most rigidly in formal styles because of the seriousness of the situations in which they are used (such as court hearings). "The style becomes a formal marker for occasions of societal importance where the interpersonal relationship is minimized" (Ervin-Tripp 1972: 235). Joshua Fishman, a sociologist

concerned with multilingualism and the social role of language, supports the notion of settings with his key concept of **domains** of use. This term refers to an institutional context which is associated with congruent behavioural patterns. Fishman's (in Gumperz & Hymes 1972: 437) aim is to gain an understanding of "who speaks what language to whom and when in those speech communities that are characterized by widespread and relatively stable multilingualism." A great deal of insight into the socio-cultural dynamics of a community is required to assign domains of language. Examples of domains include government, literature, school, playground, family, street. Business as a domain has been somewhat neglected in sociolinguistics, apart from a few studies in the workplace (outside South Africa).

Language is inextricably bound up with culture: the two support and help maintain one another. Politeness is a culturally determined social norm which varies from culture to culture. Part of being polite includes knowing when to be indirect and not to go 'bald on record'. The rules for this will inevitably vary according to a particular culture's or society's practices or values. Where directness and indirectness are cultural themes, they are always language related. Saville-Troike (1993: 35) adds:

While it may be easier to be indirect in some languages than others, communicative patterns are not necessarily tied directly to language forms. The native speaker of Arabic, Yiddish, Farsi, Indonesian or Japanese often uses English more indirectly than does a native speaker of English, for instance... As it is developed and used creatively as an auxiliary language in Nigeria, India and elsewhere in the world, English becomes 'Englishes' ... in the enactment of different cultural values and beliefs.

In addition to such difficulties with indirectness, many languages have pronoun systems which distinguish between familiar and formal *you*. In most cases solidarity and power are both factors which decide which pronoun should be used, but it is often difficult to decide which of these two should win over the other, for example in cases when the addressee is both part of the same social network and of a different status.

Japanese management techniques are making life a little simpler by eliminating surface inequalities between managers and workers. This approach is increasingly influential and explicit marking of power relationships seems to be declining (Fairclough 1989).<sup>4</sup>

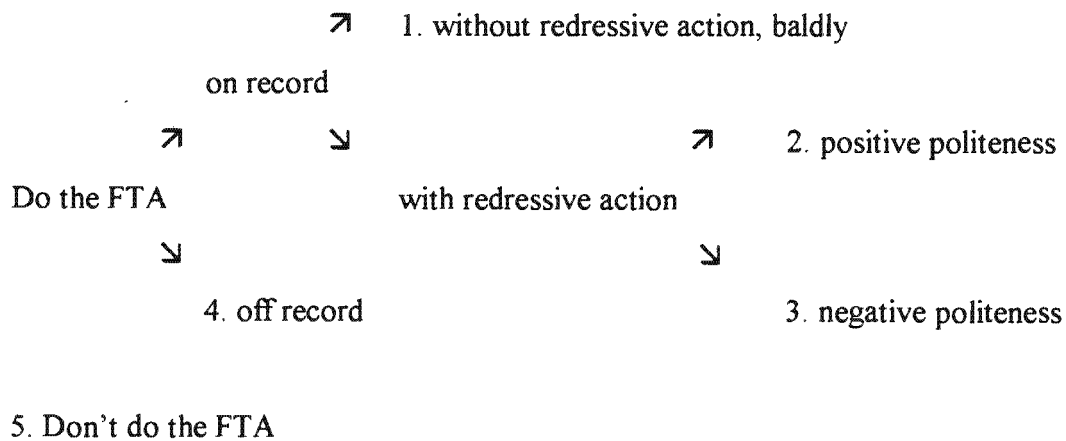
An interest in universal divergences from “some highly rational maximally efficient mode of communication” as described by Grice (1975), motivated Brown & Levinson (1987) to study politeness. They see politeness as the motivation for these divergences, and face needs as a major part of the reason for politeness. All competent adult members of a society are assumed to have face and certain rational capacities, “in particular consistent modes of reasoning from ends to the means that will achieve these ends” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). In general, as a result of this rational ability, people co-operate in maintaining each other’s face, because each one’s face is vulnerable and can be threatened by the other.

Face is seen as inherently paradoxical because it comprises two conflicting aspects: the need for negative face and the need for positive face. Positive face is the “positive consistent self-image of ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). Negative face is the “basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction - i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition” (ibid.). Scollon & Scollon (1995) term these ‘involvement’ and ‘independence’ respectively.

Because of the mutual vulnerability of face, any rational agent will attempt to avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs) or will try to minimise the threat. Various strategies, illustrated schematically below, can be employed for doing FTAs:

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<sup>4</sup>This can perhaps be explained by the relative increase of power in the working classes, which is forcing dominant classes to concede problems with the legitimacy of their power and therefore mark it less overtly.



**Fig. 2.1: Possible strategies for doing FTAs (from Brown & Levinson 1987: 69)**

These strategies are specifically defined:

1. Going **on record** means doing an act with one particular, unambiguous intention which is clear to witnesses. For example if I utter “I promise to come tomorrow”, all who had heard me would agree that I had expressed the intention of committing myself to a future action. Doing so **baldly, without redress**, implies “the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise” manner possible. A request in the form “Do it!” would be bald on record. This can be seen as speaking in accordance with Grice’s (1975: 45 - 46) maxims, which are given below:

*Maxims of quantity:*

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

*Maxims of quality:* Try to make your contribution one that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

*Maxim of relation:* Be relevant.

*Maxims of manner*: Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

Redressive action 'gives' face to the addressee, that is, the speaker attempts, with the delivery, to counteract the damage caused, or likely to be caused, by the FTA. Additions or alterations may be made which indicate that the threat is not desired or intended but the request, for example, must be made. This action can take two forms depending on which aspect of face is threatened: positive politeness or negative politeness.

2. **Positive politeness** is oriented to protecting the positive face of the addressee. This may include making it clear that the addressee is liked or belongs to the same in-group as the speaker, expressing solidarity and showing that this act is not intended as a negative evaluation of the addressee's face in general.

3. **Negative politeness** is essentially avoidance-based, aiming to leave the addressee's negative face, that is his/ her need for self-determination and freedom from imposition, intact. Apologies, hedges, distancing (of the speaker from the act, e.g. by using passives), formality and deference are commonly used as redress. Ensuring that the addressee has an 'out' so that the imposition is minimised or can be escaped is another useful strategy.

4. If an actor goes **off record**, then there is more than one intention which can be understood to have motivated him/ her. The actor then cannot be held to have committed to one particular intent.

5. Avoiding the FTA altogether.

Sociological variables also come into play in assessing the seriousness of an FTA. These are intended as actors' assumptions, not ratings of absolute power and distance. What is important is that speakers believe they share the same knowledge about these variables (Brown & Levinson 1987: 74):

- (i) the 'social distance' (D) of speaker and addressee ( a symmetric relation)
- (ii) the relative 'power' (P) of speaker and addressee (an asymmetric relation)
- (iii) the absolute ranking (R) of impositions in the particular culture

Scollon and Scollon (1995) use the same variables in defining face systems, but call them power (+P, -P), distance (+D, -D) and weight of imposition (+W, -W). Power refers to "the vertical disparity between the participants in a hierarchical structure" (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 42). Members of an organisation are generally arranged in a hierarchy, making inter-member interactions +P. Encounters between friends are usually -P. Distance has to do with familiarity and frequency of contact. Within an organisation, subordinates may have a -D relationship with their boss because they work together every day (although +P still applies). Officials of equal status from different nations will have a +D (but -P) relationship. Even if two participants have a fixed, defined relationship, the face strategies they use will vary according to the nature of the topic, request or order. A subordinate asking for a promotion, for example, will use far more deferential language and more independence strategies than usual (negative politeness). A manager informing an employee that s/he is to be retrenched, is likely to use a much lower level of involvement than usual (because s/he wishes to be distanced from the message).

Scollon & Scollon (1995) focus on the first two of these variables, as they are interested in politeness or face systems, rather than individual situational relationships. Using differences in power and degrees of distance, they propose three politeness systems. The first of these is the deference politeness system which is characterised by -P, + D. This system is used when the participants are equal but distant and they wish to show respect for one another. A high concentration of independence strategies is used to this end.

Solidarity politeness (-P, -D) is used in close symmetrical relationships, where no emphasis is placed on power difference or distance. A high level of involvement strategies is common in such interactions, for example among friends. Hierarchical politeness is the only system which is marked by +P, distance may be +/-D. Participants recognise and respect the social differences that place one in a superordinate position over the other. That participant then speaks 'down' to the subordinate, who in turn speaks 'up'. These relationships are therefore asymmetrical, and distance is not of great relevance. The speaker in a higher social position will use involvement strategies (e.g. using the addressee's first name) and the lower participant independence strategies (e.g. addressing the superior by title and surname). Because asymmetrical interactions are based on power difference, "[w]hen two participants differ in their assessment of face strategies, it will tend to be perceived as a difference in power" (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 48). For example, if the subordinate in the interaction described above, decided to, or knew no better than to address the superior participant by name, it would be perceived as insolence, disrespect, impertinence etc..

### 2.3.3 Language in Use

Pragmatics can be distinguished from semantics as it deals with "the effect of symbols of various kinds on speakers and listeners, i.e., with the significance of what is communicated for the actors involved" (Blom & Gumperz 1972: 417), whereas semantics is, very simply put, the study of meaning in language. This includes both speaker meaning, i.e., what the speaker intends to convey, and word or sentence meaning, what a word or sentence "counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned" (Hurford & Heasley 1983: 3). The same message can be interpreted as an offer or a criticism, thanks or disapproval depending on the situation. This occurs regardless of the speaker's intent and relies instead on the expectations of the audience, and their socio-cultural background. The interpersonal significance of usage cannot, therefore, be ignored.

Hymes (cited in Gumperz 1971) asserts that language usage rather than grammatical categories most closely reflect social influences. Various kinds of social information can be

coded in very simple linguistic utterances. For example, the Afrikaans offer, *Wil U miskien sit?* ('Would you perhaps like to sit (down)?') not only makes an offer to the addressee, but also implies that the addressee is respected by the speaker or is perceived to be of higher status. This is signalled by the use of the polite address form *U*, as well as the addition of *miskien*, softening the structure to sound even more like a suggestion than an order. Accent, particular lexical items or syntactic structures (such as double negative in dialects of English) can also indicate the social position of the speaker. The listener's reaction will frequently reveal as much as the speaker's choices. Switches from one language, dialect or register to another can also be of relevance. This signalling nature of language is what led Halliday (1978) to the phrase 'language as social semiotic' (although his concept is more complex than suggested here).

In order to use a language effectively and appropriately, more than merely grammatical rules must be learnt: speakers need to internalise norms for when and how to use the structures they have learnt. Because these structures are conventionalised and used to signal particular relations or situations, they have social effect. When they are used inappropriately they may seem shocking or rude, but when used according to the norms, they generally serve to maintain the *status quo*, i.e. what has become the unmarked balance of rights and obligations. The ability to use language in this way is known as communicative competence and is essentially a prerequisite for successful communication of any kind. Bourdieu (1991) also discusses this notion, suggesting that the dimension of when and how to use linguistic knowledge is added to Chomsky's concept of 'linguistic competence'. This can only be learnt in practice in various social situations. Therefore speech is implicated in social relationships, because competence (in Bourdieu's view) is also the ability to command an audience and take turns in conversation when appropriate or desired. Power relations, determined by the three kinds of capital identified by Bourdieu, dictate who says what, when, to whom and how it is said. Often what is actually said is a compromise between what we would like to say and what we can say in the circumstances, i.e. what our symbolic capital entitles us to. Bourdieu's notion thus parallels the ethnographic definition of communicative competence, proposed by Hymes.

Hymes (1974: 95) is critical of Chomsky's divide between competence and performance, believing competence to be far broader than Chomsky suggests:

An adequate approach must distinguish and investigate four aspects of competence: (a) systematic potential - whether and to what extent something is not yet realized, and, in a sense, not yet known; ... (b) appropriateness - whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable, effective, or the like; (c) occurrence - whether and to what extent something is done; (d) feasibility - whether and to what extent something is possible, given the means of implementation available.

Chomsky, in effect, reduces competence to the first of these, and therefore leaves the other three to be included in performance.

Saville-Troike (1993: 3, 26) provides the following comments on communicative competence, adding to our understanding of Hymes' concept:

The requisite knowledge includes not only rules for communication (both linguistic and sociolinguistic) and shared rules for interaction, but also the cultural rules that are the basis for the context and content of communicative events and interaction processes. ...

Since communicative competence refers to the knowledge and skills for contextually appropriate use and interpretation of language in a community, it refers to the communicative knowledge and skills shared by the group, although these (like all aspects of culture) reside variably in its individual members.

She further provides the following outline of the range of shared knowledge speakers must have in order to communicate appropriately (1993: 25):

1. Linguistic knowledge
  - (a) Verbal elements
  - (b) Nonverbal elements

- (c) Patterns of elements in particular speech events
- (d) Range of possible variants (in all elements and their organization)
- (e) Meaning of variants in particular situations

## 2. Interaction skills

- (a) Perception of salient features in communicative situations
- (b) Selection and interpretation of forms appropriate to specific situation, roles, and relationships (rules for the use of speech)
- (c) Norms of interaction and interpretation
- (d) Strategies for achieving goals

## 3. Cultural knowledge

- (a) Social structure
- (b) Values and attitudes
- (c) Cognitive map/ schema
- (d) Enculturation process (transmission of knowledge and skills)

The notion of communicative competence is important in intercultural communication, as individuals have to expand their competence when entering new cultures and may be discriminated against if they do not master norms of appropriate use.

### 2.3.4 Accommodation Theory

Gumperz (1982b) is interested in discovering what is communicated by the linguistic choice people make in particular situations. He believes that the choice of words as well as grammatical structure and pronunciation are potentially meaningful. In order to determine whether there are regular relationships between particular forms and particular interpretations, he uses a “speaker oriented approach to conversation ... [which] focuses directly on strategies that govern the actor’s use of lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic and other knowledge in the production and interpretation of message in context”

(Gumperz 1982b: 35). Code-switching and accommodation are both governed by speaker choices and are used for various aims.

Giles and his colleagues in social psychology believe that language choice cannot be adequately explained purely with reference to situational factors; aspects of interpersonal relations have to be taken into account. Accordingly they developed a theory of interpersonal speech accommodation (Giles & Powesland 1975). The essence of accommodation theory lies in social psychological research of similarity-attraction, which suggests that an individual can induce another to evaluate him/her more favourably by reducing dissimilarities between them. "Whether we are aware of it or not we each have our own 'implicit personality theories' which enable us, with varying degrees of validity, to construct impressions of people from whatever information about them is available" (Giles & Powesland 1975: 1). Speech accommodation may therefore be seen as an attempt by the speaker to gain social approval. This may have certain costs, such as identity change and expended effort, so this behaviour is most likely to occur if there is some perceived reward. Speaker A's subconscious rationale prompts changes in accent, gesture and posture, as well as particular word or code choices to approximate Speaker B's speech. Speaker A assumes that Speaker B chose the language which would project a particular image of which Speaker B approves, and therefore by imitating the language, Speaker A will project an image which Speaker B will evaluate favourably (Giles & Powesland 1975: 158 -9).

The process of adjustment can take two forms: convergence and divergence. Convergence involves narrowing the gap between participants as much as possible by choosing the language, dialect or style the listener is most comfortable with, or which most closely reflects the listener's speech. Divergence is the emphasis of difference, with the speaker maximising distance by making particular communicative choices. The same initial evaluation takes place of what the listener favours, but then the opposite is projected by the speaker.

### 2.3.5 Code-switching

Scholars have proposed a variety of models of code-switching that aim to explain the types of switches that occur when bilingual speakers interact and why they occur. Several terms have been used to refer to various types of code-switching. Different distinctions have been made between, for example, all kinds of switching and lexical borrowing, or intraclausal and interclausal switches. The definitions here follow McCormick (1995: 194): Intra-sentential switching of short elements, even single words is referred to as **code-mixing**. Consistent use of this practice can result in a fairly stable mixed code within a community (e.g. District Six vernacular). **Code-switching**, as well as serving as the superordinate term, is used to refer to inter-sentential switching and usually serves specific purposes or has stylistic or social effects. **Borrowing**<sup>5</sup> refers to “the adoption into one language of items, patterns and meanings from another” (Branford & Claughton 1995: 209). Examples in South African English are *veld*, *braai*, *takkies* from Afrikaans<sup>6</sup>; *donga* (‘pothole’) and *hamba*, glossed as ‘get you gone’, from the Nguni languages. Tags added in another language to serve as emblems of the bilingual character of the discourse are known as **emblematic switches** (Appel & Muysken 1987: 118).

In their Norway study, Blom & Gumperz (1972: 424-6) discuss two kinds of switching: situational and metaphorical. Situational switches mark a change in the participants’ definition of the social event within a particular setting. That is, the participants perceive their roles or relationships to have changed and switch codes accordingly. Metaphorical switching, by contrast usually occurs when participants have more than one type of relationship. For example, in a formal setting such as a bank, the clerk is likely to address the client in the standard, as official affairs are defined as non-local and therefore the standard is appropriate. However, many of the individuals interacting will also know one another as friends or neighbours and interject casual statements in the local dialect into the formal discussion. There is no significant redefinition of the participants’ rights and

<sup>5</sup> See also Appel & Muysken 1987: 165ff. for a more detailed discussion of types of borrowing, constraints on borrowing and examples.

<sup>6</sup> *veld* – ‘South African wild grassland’; *braai* – ‘barbecue’; *takkies* – ‘trainers/ sports shoes’

obligations; the switch refers to a change in topic or subject. This is closely linked with the poetic function of language (Jakobson 1960/1972) which can also be served by language choice, i.e. code-switching. Appel & Muysken (1987: 118-120) apply Jakobson's model of the functions of language to code-switching, but I do not find their argument entirely convincing.

Carol Myers-Scotton (1992) devised a model of code-switching for Africa, based on her extensive fieldwork in East Africa. She sees social consequences as motivating linguistic code choices but does not deny the importance of social groups emphasised in particular by Labov. "Social memberships remain paramount, but mainly in determining speakers' linguistic repertoires. Actual choices - how speakers draw on their repertoires - depend more on the personae they wish to project, both to identify themselves as members of certain groups and to negotiate their position in interpersonal relations" (Myers-Scotton 1992:165).

The theory Myers-Scotton proposes for code-switching is based on a number of assumptions about language and code-choice. (1) Firstly, following Austin (1962), language and code-switching are seen as having a performative function. (2) By analogy with Grice's (1975) principle of conversational co-operation, code-switching rests on a principle of negotiation. (3) Speakers are rational decision makers and choose the codes they wish to use. Usually they are also influenced by consideration of face needs and accommodation. This idea is also present in the work of Giles & Powesland (1975). (4) "Social meaning of talk exchange is accomplished by the exchange itself" (Myers-Scotton 1992: 166). In other words, code-switches, like language, are part of the negotiation of social meaning and of constituting the social situation. (5) Particular choices are marked in particular settings. Markedness is a continuum from the expected to the shocking, with unmarked choices reflecting the unmarked or expected balance of rights and obligations between the addresser and the addressee. This is in keeping with the view expressed by Ervin-Tripp (1972) that when co-occurrence rules are violated, it is the marked forms that occur that draw attention to themselves.

Myers-Scotton proposes four social functions for code-switching:

- 1) Code-switching to present sequential unmarked choices
- 2) Code-switching itself as the unmarked choice
- 3) Code-switching to make a marked choice
- 4) Code-switching to make an exploratory choice

The first of these is used to signify change in the situational factors or their relative importance. Blom & Gumperz (see above) call this situational switching but Myers-Scotton prefers to think of it as speaker-motivated. The second kind of switching could perhaps be better referred to as mixing. It signals the speaker's mixed or complex identity and is often used as vernacular by a community, for example in District Six. The third kind of switching calls for a change in the established balance of rights and obligations; the speaker does not wish to accept the status quo. Factors such as power, ethnicity and status are highlighted by such a choice. Finally, code-switching can be used to establish the unmarked balance of rights and obligations in an unconventional situation. When participants do not know enough about the situation or one another to know the unmarked choice, they may try one code option after another and then choose the one which elicits the most favourable response. This can be used as a strategy of neutrality as can sequential unmarked choices: both aim to establish the unmarked balance of rights and obligations where it is not initially known.

## 2.4 Towards Intercultural Sensitivity: Training Approaches

Jupp et al. (1982) refer to the linguistic dimension of cultural or ethnic conflict as "the hidden process". It is precisely because this process is hidden and not visible to participants in any kind of interaction, but especially in intercultural encounters, that it has the potential to be destructive. Participants continue to behave in the same way as they would with peers, not realising that the conventions which govern their communication and interpretation do not necessarily hold for others. This leads to a range of negative factors and reinforces ill feeling among members of different groups. The "mutually

reinforcing negative cycle” (Jupp et al 1982: 244) is likely to continue unless a mediator steps in or individuals are made aware of the problem, i.e. that participants are playing the game by different rules. Increasing awareness of such problems is essential in South Africa: “The successful transformation of the workplace to include all sections of society and maximise human resource potential is one of the challenges facing South African organisations” (Bosch in Cape Argus, 20 May 1998).

There are various ways to tackle this challenge. I have identified three ways to address discrimination against a minority group in the work place. These approaches are based on the assumption that language, particularly speech, is judged by others:

- 1) Train the minority group to speak like the dominant group (so that they appear to be members of the dominant group)
- 2) Stand in for them in particular kinds of encounters (e.g. where they may be negatively evaluated for their speech)
- 3) Teach tolerance, adaptability, cultural conventions and sensitivity to them and those they work with.

We might well ask which of these solves the problem and for whom. In many cases companies send employees for speech training so that they will represent the company more ‘correctly’ or more professionally. This may be a very negative experience for the employees, because it undermines their identity as manifested in their speech. Janine Weisenberg, a communication skills expert from the Cape Town school *Speechwise*, believes that speakers should be made proud of their identity, which includes accent, and should learn to project their voices and speak clearly, rather than denying who they are and attempting to speak like someone else. As a result she may concentrate on confidence rather than issues such as pronunciation. *Speechwise* trains staff from (large) corporations in telephone skills, business language and interpersonal skills. The teachers try to encourage their pupils to speak clearly and confidently in any accent, not wanting to take away their cultural identity. It has been necessary in the past to teach a particular accent

(associated with Respectable South African English<sup>7</sup>), either because a learner insisted or because the employer was satisfied with nothing else. It is hoped that changing attitudes will preclude the necessity for such measures in future. The school also emphasises cultural difference and encourages awareness of other ways of operating, even if these seem to conflict with one's own practices. However, the attitude towards speech training seems to be improving: companies are less likely to stress that employees should lose their Xhosa accent, and instead focus on clear speech (Weisenberg, personal communication: May 1998).

A recent survey showed that a large percentage of organisations in South Africa are involved in some kind of bridging programme. The aim of a bridging programme is to equip current and prospective employees with "the skills to function effectively in the modern workplace" (Bosch in *Cape Argus*, 20 May 1998). Affirmative action, skills development and multi-skilling, employment equity, creating opportunity and redeployment were some of the major issues addressed by organisations. Skills development with the promise of promotion or permanent employment as incentive headed the list. Most programmes were seen as long term investments and were therefore geared towards future benefit rather than immediate results.

It was mentioned previously that social information is coded in language. Word choice, pronunciation, particular grammatical structures can all hold information about the speaker, perceptions of the audience and the situation. Gumperz is also interested in what is communicated by language choices in particular situations. He believes that choice of words as well as grammatical structure and pronunciation may bear social meaning. Like Myers-Scotton (1992) he sees language choice as speaker motivated and takes a "speaker-oriented approach to conversation ...[which] focuses directly on strategies that govern actors' use of lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic and other knowledge in the production and interpretation of messages in context" (Gumperz 1982b: 35). However, unlike Myers-

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<sup>7</sup> Lass (1995) provides a good summary of the phonological aspects of South African English, as well as placing it in a socio-historic context.

Scotton's, his model has been criticised for being unilingual: He does not consider other languages as options for language choice, but looks only at variation within English.

As a result of the fact that language can index so much about its users, many speakers are embarrassed about the way they speak, about their accent, items in their lexicon, particular grammatical structures and so on. I found this to be true when speaking to Weisenberg of *Speechwise* who deals largely with black business people in South Africa for whom English is a second language. She is adamant that each person should be allowed to speak the way s/he wants to and is able to and she prefers to work on business phrases and teaching people to project a positive and confident image of themselves. She feels that this, perhaps combined with an effort to speak clearly and carefully, would be far better than attempting to teach people new accents and new ways of speaking. She also feels that every person's accent is a part of who that person is, a part of their unique identity and does not feel comfortable taking this away from them. She would far rather maintain 'interesting' and 'beautiful' accents of all different kinds, than aim to create one unified (and boring) norm of middle-class white English pronunciation (Weisenberg, personal communication: May 1998).

Jupp et al. (1982) discuss other ways of breaking the negative cycle. First language research has shown that as children learn language, they are socialised into the particular culture in which they are brought up. This includes learning to use the language appropriately and effectively in a range of situations. However, when adults from minority groups move into a new culture, they are not socialised in the same way. Minorities themselves are tempted to adopt the assumptions of deficit models of language: once they have learned the language they lack, they will be equipped to function competently in the society in which they find themselves. Their social position usually entitles them to very little social or symbolic capital and they are frequently relatively powerless to "talk their way through opportunities and to more social power" (Jupp et al. 1982: 244). The work place where this kind of talk is most often required, is a stressful environment and does not allow for peer group interaction which aids socialisation. Their contact with members

of the majority group is also likely to be quite limited, again eliminating chances for learning.

Jupp et al. (1982) suggest the following steps to combat these problems:

- help trainees to understand the hidden process by which differences feed into negative characterisation of different groups
- create social situations which must be or at least seem to be real (and therefore must involve participants from the appropriate cultural groups)
- examine various stages with trainees, aiming to analyse differences without judging

Jupp et al. (1982: 248) suggest that through such an analysis people can begin “to recognise that the personal perceptions present in interaction are the interplay of received cultural knowledge, of observation, and of inference from the data in actual interaction”. Parker et al. (1992) suggest a six step training process which involves developing personal awareness, examining the process of stereotyping and developing an awareness of other groups, developing sensitivity and communication skills and finally taking steps in multicultural action planning.

Much of the training suggested here overlaps with Bennett’s model for intercultural sensitivity (1993). Bennett developed an instrument consisting of a set of questions, which can be used to measure cultural sensitivity. According to Bennett (1993: 23), “intercultural sensitivity is not natural. It is not part of our primate past, nor has it characterized most of human history. Cross-cultural contact usually has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide”. There are several examples in our history of the phenomena he mentions: tribal wars, oppression and vicious discrimination in South Africa. However, it is now generally acknowledged that communication is making the world (metaphorically) smaller, organisations are expanding globally, towns are less isolated and intercultural contact is increasing. It is therefore necessary to adopt a new approach to intercultural communication.

Bennett is interested in the ways in which cultural difference is construed, and in the various kinds of experience that accompany different constructions of the world and of others. He terms this experience 'intercultural sensitivity' and describes it in terms of developmental phases. He defines intercultural sensitivity as, "the construction of reality as increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference that constitutes development" (1993: 24). The model is linear, and beginning, intermediate and end stages, as well as the phases in between can be described. An individual can move along the continuum to reach ultimate intercultural sensitivity. (Bennett also suggests training methods which are likely to achieve development with people in each particular stage.)

The stages of cultural sensitivity are divided into ethnocentric and ethnorelative sets. The ethnocentric stages are denial, defence and minimization; whereas the ethnorelativist stages are acceptance, adaptation and finally, integration. Each of these stages has subsections and there are areas between the stages which are less clearly defined points on the continuum.

The Ethnocentric Stages	The Ethnorelative Stages
I. DENIAL a. Isolation b. Separation	IV. ACCEPTANCE a. Respect for Behavioural Difference b. Respect for Value Difference
II. DEFENCE a. Denigration b. Superiority c. Reversal	V. ADAPTATION a. Empathy b. Pluralism
III. MINIMIZATION a. Physical Universalism b. Transcendent Universalism	VI. INTEGRATION a. Contextual Evaluation b. Constructive Marginality

**Fig. 3.2: Stages of Development to Intercultural Sensitivity (based on Bennett 1993)**

The term 'ethnocentric' refers, quite simply, to those who assume that the world-view of their own particular culture is central to all reality. The most extreme form of the

difference is not acknowledged. Presented with obvious differences in the way people operate, those in denial will maintain that cultural diversity only happens elsewhere. This stage comprises two parts: isolation and separation. The first refers to the denial of difference as a result of physical **isolation**. Characteristic reactions to difference are forming stereotypes of 'others', giggling with embarrassment at the oddities of others, or studious politeness.

**Separation** is defined as the intentional isolation of an individual or group by erecting social barriers to keep out those who are 'different from us'. Racially or ethnically selective clubs or segregated neighbourhoods are examples of this phenomenon. This may be self-perpetuating if one has always been in a separate environment, not exposed to any kind of difference.

People in any stage of denial do not seek out quarrels and tend to keep to themselves. However, there is a tendency to relegate all 'others' to a subhuman status. This is perfectly illustrated by South Africa's apartheid policies. Denial is a luxury of the dominant group. Oppressed groups are forced to acknowledge their own differences from what is "usual". As Bennett puts it (1993: 33) "When it is your difference that is being denied, it's hard to deny that there's a difference!"

The next stage of development is **defence**. This occurs when cultural differences become too glaringly obvious to deny and are perceived as threatening. "The threat is to one's sense of reality and thus to one's identity, which at this point is a function of that one cultural reality" (1993: 35). The most common defensive strategy, is to **denigrate** those who display other characteristics or views. Negative stereotyping, statements of hostility and (apparent) belief in the inherent inferiority of another group are often seen. This again was demonstrated in South African history with Blacks being stereotyped as stupid, dirty, fit only for menial labour and so on.

The second phase of defence is **superiority**. This phase shows a switch from expressly putting others down and instead focuses on the superiority of one's own cultural group. Other groups are seen as needing help in order to develop and reach cultural maturity. The USA, for example, offers "aid to developing countries", with one of the broad aims being to bring them under America's influence. Bennett suggests that the term 'developing' implies some direction and destination and that the destination looks rather like the USA.

The final phase of defence is a **reversal** of this pattern to denigrating one's own culture. This phase is not inevitable, but it is fairly common. A good example is the recent move towards Eastern philosophies in the West, with many believing that Westerners are insensitive, out of touch with their own emotional and spiritual sides and so forth. The problem with this stage is that although it seems to display cultural sensitivity, it in fact remains ethnocentric in that other cultures are defined in terms of one's own.

The final attempt to preserve the autonomy of one's own culture, involves the **minimization** of the differences among groups. The focus here is on cultural similarity, with all groups seen as sharing basic characteristics. However, these are usually typical of the group making the assertion and it is almost always the dominant group. Again oppressed groups tend to be more aware of their own differences and therefore move out of this stage fairly quickly. This assumption of common humanity (as Bennett terms it), too often means something like 'everyone is really like me underneath'.

Minimization takes two forms: **physical universalism** and transcendent universalism. The former is based on the belief that all human beings share basic physical needs and characteristics, with cultures seen merely as permutations of a fundamental biology. It is likely that people at this stage of development will unconsciously use their own cultural norms to interpret any behaviour they encounter. **Transcendent universalism** "suggests that all human beings, whether they know it or not, are products of some single transcendent principle, law or imperative" (Bennett 1993: 43). Evangelical spreading of your own or your culture's beliefs, is an example of this as the underlying motivation is to

bring the truth to others; to the ignorant or unfortunate who have not yet discovered it. However, these 'poor souls' may well be quite satisfied with the truth that they believe in.

From here the move into ethnorelativism begins. The first stage of ethnorelativism is **acceptance**: the existence of cultural difference is acknowledged and respected; the "existence of difference is accepted as a necessary and preferable human condition" (Bennett 1993: 48). Generally **respect for behavioural difference** precedes **respect for value difference**, as the former are more easily observed and explained as manifestations of culture. Among the most obvious of behavioural differences are language and communicative patterns or strategies. In the next stage, assumptions underlying different cultural world-views, which are expressed in differing behaviour, are also accepted. Alternative beliefs about the 'truth' of the world are seen as viable and 'assumption' is now perceived as an action rather than a given fact or a pre-existing noun. Street (1993) argues this point from an anthropological perspective in an article entitled *Culture is a Verb*. In other words, people in this phase of development realise that beliefs, values and assumptions are merely things we believe, value or assume about the world, rather than features built into our design or into the design of the world.

At the stage of **adaptation**, skills for communicating with people of other cultures, and relating to them, are improved. The most important realisation in this stage is that culture is a process: one engages with culture (one's own or those of others); like values and beliefs, it is not something one has. As a result, it is possible to behave in ways which are appropriate to other cultures without threatening the existence of one's own culture. So, it is quite safe to do as the Romans do, when in Rome. This behaviour merely adds to one's repertoire of cultural alternatives. Empathy and pluralism are the subsections of this stage.

**Empathy** is specifically opposed to sympathy which requires only a shift in assumed position and is based on the belief that another will feel the same way as oneself in particular circumstances. Empathy, by contrast, requires a shift in frame of reference, attempting to understand a situation or experience from another's perspective. It is based

on the assumption of difference, and allows for hypothetical participation in another world-view.

**Pluralism** refers to a commitment to a multitude of possible truths and the internalisation of more than one set of cultural norms. Members of oppressed minority cultures who manage to maintain the appropriate cultural behaviour within their own group, as well as functioning successfully within the dominant culture are pluralistic, as more than one culture is part of their identity. This stage can be stressful, as people have to reconcile the different identities which constitute them and often come under fire from people who are less interculturally developed. They may be called 'sell-outs' (South Africa), 'Oreo cookies' or 'coconuts' (America), both of which are black or brown on the outside and white inside, 'brown Sahibs' (colonial India)<sup>8</sup> or simply 'traitors'.

The final stage of development on Bennett's scale, is **integration**. He does point out, however, that this is not necessarily the end of the process and there is always room for more development and learning. An integrated person is multicultural and commands a variety of cultures as part of normal life. According to Adler (cited in Bennett 1993: 59), the multicultural person is one whose "essential identity is inclusive of life patterns different from his own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities." The integration stage occurs when disparate aspects of one's identity are reconciled into a new whole, without committing to one culture.

All ethnorelative phases until this point have placed importance on non-evaluation of difference. This was important in coming to accept difference. However, as Bennett (1993: 60) aptly puts it, "[p]artfully developed ethno-relativism may lead individuals into a multiplistic quagmire where all possible choices among alternative perspectives seem equally good." Remaining in this state for an extended period may lead to a retreat to the safer ground of ethnocentrism or to an unstable detached condition. The solution offered by **contextual evaluation**, the first phase of integration, is to evaluate each situation and

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Rajend Mesthrie for this piece of information.

decide on an appropriate course of action. One can also choose to subject a particular phenomenon to more than one cultural frame for the purpose of evaluation. This approach enables oppressed groups to separate out oppressive aspects of the dominant culture instead of rejecting the culture as a whole, and evaluate their own culture, embracing only elements which are meaningful to them.

**Constructive marginality** has also been called “dynamic-in-betweenness” (Yoshikawa cited in Bennett 1993: 63). A multicultural or constructively marginal person operates outside normal cultural boundaries. Such a person is not committed to any one culture, but rather has a range of cultural options available and chooses whichever seems most appropriate in particular circumstances. There is no automatic cultural identity with built-in culturally-based assumptions for such a person: all assumptions and behaviours are questioned and none are necessarily right.

Human's (1996: 5) motto for her work in diversity management training is: “Managing diversity is not about ‘managing them, out there’; it is all about ‘managing me, in here’. It is about managing the conversations I have with myself, in order that I can better manage the conversations I have with a diversity of others.” And it is about power relations and control. Human (ibid.) believes that diversity management is ultimately about “how I see myself in relation to others and the value-judgements I place on their behaviours or cultures”, not about learning other languages or even about intercultural training. However, she does consider sensitivity and tolerance as significant and approves of Bennett's model (Human, personal communication: January 1999).

## 2.5 Interactional Sociolinguistics

### 2.5.1 Preparing the Way

In his introduction to Directions in Sociolinguistics, Gumperz (1972) gives the historical background to interactional sociolinguistics, saying that new theoretical insights and changes in research orientation are best understood in a historical context. I will follow him in my attempt to highlight the main tenets of interactional sociolinguistics.

Modern sociolinguistics probably began with investigations of speech patterns in speech communities. Early studies of the language of human groups began in the belief that language and sound change are regular and predictable by laws which allow no exceptions. Scholars set out to prove or disprove this Neo-grammarians hypothesis, launching into field studies of various languages and dialects. Bloomfield's (1933) discussion of speech communities was an important early study which added to the study of how social factors affect language change.

Unfortunately his ideas were not immediately investigated empirically, and arguments as to what represented dialect boundaries proliferated. Scholars collected samples from speakers who became dots on maps. Isoglosses were drawn joining the dots with similar pronunciation or speech patterns. Bundles were made of isoglosses, attempting to group them into dialects. There was little agreement, however, about which factors were more or less important in deciding which lines or bundles belonged together.

A theory was needed which would rank potential indices in order of importance, and the structuralists provided it. The structuralists drew on Saussure's classic dichotomy between *parole* and *langue*, separating speech in a social context from the internal language system. They realised that valid generalisations about data could only be made if they focused on contrastive relationships among similar sets of sounds, rather than the articulatory characteristics of individual sounds. "In its most general form, structuralist theory holds that human cognition can be described in terms of abstract, relationally

defined, context free symbolic categories. These contrastive systems serve as the ultimate reference point against which we evaluate or derive meaning from behaviour, guiding our perception of empirical cues into established channels and filtering out information that does not fit” (Gumperz 1982b: 11).

One of the scholars who spent a great deal of time deriving structural categories from raw data, was the anthropologist Edward Sapir (1949). In his study of North American Indians he concluded that meaning is both culture bound and subconsciously patterned. What this means is that we see in the world what we are subconsciously programmed to perceive and therefore we are often blind to things in the world which are not in keeping with our programming. The structuralists recognised that “[l]earning is not, as empiricists tend to claim, purely a matter of accumulating raw experience. What we perceive and retain in our mind is a function of our culturally determined predisposition to perceive and assimilate. ... What others had seen as signs of primitivity or failure to conform to pre-existing standards of rationality and efficiency now became evidence for the existence and functioning of cultural difference” (Gumperz 1982b: 13-14). Although Gumperz supports Sapir’s view of culture, he is critical of the fact that no attempt was made to prove the assumptions that homogeneous groups of people, ‘cultural groups’, exist and that their culture affects their world view or their use of language or vice versa. Gumperz comments that work on language and culture may be very interesting, but it remains rather speculative.

Structuralist investigations tended to focus on phonology and morphology, but the emphasis of research was constantly changing. With the rise of Chomskian generative grammar in the 1960s, the syntactic structure of sentences became the focus of linguistic study. This brought major changes to linguistic and social science methodology, with a move away from elicitation techniques and a new emphasis on gaining theoretical insights and constructing systems which would allow one to understand the nature of phenomena such as language. Chomsky imagined idealised speakers in an ideal community for the purpose of his studies. Social factors were of no concern to him, as they were in some sense ‘outside’ the language. Chomsky echoed Saussure’s dichotomy between *langue* and

*parole* with his terms ‘competence’ and ‘performance’. The divide between these concepts allowed him to ignore all that was not part of the internal language system, or linguistic competence, of an ideal speaker.

In spite of its theoretical significance, generative grammar obviously had only limited value for the study of verbal interactions. In addition it became clear that a linguist’s definition of language as a grammatical system was not equivalent to the folk notion of language. When linguists began to study languages which resembled each other in terms of grammar, they found that several pairs or sets of language were almost identical ‘grammatical systems’. However, in each case the speakers saw their languages as distinct. Languages such as Hindi and Urdu in India, Nynorsk and Bokmal in Norway, Serbian and Croatian in the former Yugoslavia are almost identical in grammatical terms, but are recognised as discrete languages popularly by the speakers and in many cases by law. This discrepancy can probably be ascribed to issues of cultural identity, politics and even sentimental value (Gumperz 1982b: 21).

Another problem that both structuralists and generativists had, was that isogloss techniques seemed to work only in rural areas, and yielded no useful results in urban settings. It was only in 1963, with his Martha’s Vineyard project, that William Labov began to study variation in language in and of itself, rather than dismissing it as an unfortunate interference with regular patterns. Gumperz considers this a major progression in the development of sociolinguistics. The new paradigm “rejects Saussure’s and Chomsky’s assumptions about the uniformity of grammatical systems” and instead “[s]ocial variability is regarded as an inherent property of linguistic systems ...” (Gumperz 1982b: 24).

Labov studied speech communities and proposed that predictable variation could be used to mark social categories. He found that categorical rules and variable rules existed within language and minority social or cultural groups frequently altered the rules of the dominant culture’s language. Labov’s methods were largely quantitative and had limited

value for interpreting face-to-face interactions. But learning from those before them, Gumperz and others began to shape the field of interactional sociolinguistics.

### 2.5.2 The Rise of Interactional Sociolinguistics

Interactional sociolinguistics arose for various reasons. One of these was the need for a way to analyse face-to-face interactions. Another reason was that speech communities have become (and are still becoming) more difficult to delineate, “since competent language users who are geographical neighbours may be linguistic distant cousins at best” (Hansell & Ajirotutu 1982: 85). Although such neighbours usually assume they share a common code, fruitful communication may be difficult or even unlikely. Increasing diversity can be witnessed in societies throughout the world, and urban areas in particular display remarkable diversity linguistically, culturally, ethnically and in religions. This has made even variation studies like Labov’s more difficult, driving a group of linguists to examining the communicative strategies of individuals in their daily interactions. Analysis is increasingly focusing on discourse and rhetorical strategies. A study done in 1969 shows how one group can gain and hold control of an intercultural conversation by being aware of cultural markers and using them to confuse or exclude participants who do not share these cultural norms. This makes it clear “that mutual intelligibility is not solely contingent upon a shared language base but also upon shared discourse features” (Hansell & Ajirotutu 1982: 93).

It is important for Gumperz (1982b: 29) “to begin with a closer understanding of how linguistic signs interact with social knowledge in discourse.” He is critical of attempting correlations between speech and social categories, although these may be interesting. He feels that these ignore some important questions such as why linguistic variation may correlate with socio-economic status in some societies, education in others, and cultural background in yet others and why all socially differentiated societies do not show linguistic variation in accordance with the social strata. He also cites Bernstein’s discussion of ‘restricted’ and ‘elaborated’ codes. Bernstein showed that although restricted codes are most commonly found among the lower strata, they are also found in

certain upper-class groups. There is no way to explain such “subcultural differences” (Gumperz 1971: 223) by a correlational method.

In Gumperz’ view, an approach to social theory which is “somewhat more in line with sociolinguistic findings is the interactionist approach... Interactionists deny the parallelism between social and physical measurement... Sociological measurement, in their view, always involves both the informant’s and the investigator’s perception of the categories that are being measured” (Gumperz 1971: 224). Social categories can therefore only be interpreted in terms of situational constraints. Status is not a permanent quality of the speaker; it can be isolated as part of an analyst’s abstract model, but is always perceived in a particular situation or context. This destroys the division between linguistic and social categories: they are interdependent as social categories are constructed anew, at least in part, in every situation and this is done through language.

### 2.5.3 Concerns of Interactional Sociolinguistics

One of the basic premises of interactional sociolinguistics, is that communication plays a role in the exercise of power and control (see also Fairclough 1989) and in the production and reproduction of social identity. Emphasis is placed on contextual aspects of communication, specifically in interpersonal encounters. There is no emphasis on gender, ethnicity and class as these are not considered to be constants, but rather are seen as communicatively produced and altered through ongoing negotiation. What communication *does* is important because it can reinforce or alleviate “distance, difference and stereotype” (Jupp et al. 1982: 234).

Myers-Scotton (1992) in her code-switching model also assumes language, and therefore code-switching, to fulfil performative functions. Human beings are seen as actively creating the social reality in which they operate through their negotiations with others.

Gumperz (1982a: 1) explains his approach as follows:

We customarily take gender, ethnicity and class as given parameters and boundaries within which we create our own social identities. The study of

language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted but are communicatively produced.

Therefore to understand issues of identity and how they affect and are affected by social, political, and ethnic divisions we need to gain insight into the communicative processes by which they arise.

Michael Halliday (1978: 191) makes a similar point in Language as Social Semiotic when he describes language as constitutive of reality: “as language becomes a metaphor of reality, so by the same process reality becomes a metaphor of language. Since reality is a social construct, it can be constructed only through an exchange of meanings. Hence meanings are seen as constitutive of reality.” He goes on to describe language as a social semiotic. By this he means that language is a semiotic system interpreted within a socio-cultural context which is itself interpreted as an information system. “A social reality (or a ‘culture’) is itself an edifice of meanings - a semiotic construct. In this perspective, language is one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture...” (Halliday 1978: 2). To put it more simply, people affirm their own statuses and roles in acting out the social structure in their day to day interactions, and in doing so establish, transmit and perpetuate the shared systems of value and of knowledge.

Even in an ‘antisociety’, i.e. a counter culture within the society, language is used to constitute an alternate reality. An antilanguage is likely to arise in a society which is split into two opposing groups. According to Halliday (1978: 185) these groups can be called the society and the antisociety, with their languages known as ‘language’ and ‘antilanguage’ respectively. “The antilanguage is a language of social conflict - of passive resistance or active opposition; but at the same time, like any other language, it is a means of expressing and maintaining the social structure - in this case, the structure of the antisociety”.

Modern bureaucratic industrial society is increasingly diverse ethnically, culturally and religiously. This has given rise to contact between members of different groups who

previously lived in isolated communities. Technology is also playing a role in bringing people of the world together and creating new interactive situations and possibilities. These carry with them, as a result of the differences among those who are suddenly thrown together, greater scope for misunderstanding, cultural misrepresentation and stereotyping. In addition, communication skills have begun to play a very different role in society. Both oral and written skills are important in education, job application and evaluation, and play an integral part in creating a favourable impression. It is essential to be able to use language to negotiate, argue, support, request, explain or ask for clarification. "The ability to manage or adapt to diverse communicative situations has become essential and the ability to interact with people with whom one has no personal acquaintance is crucial to acquiring even a small measure of personal and social control" (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982: 4).

The term 'symbolic capital' was proposed by Bourdieu to describe the prestige and reputation associated with a "whole social person" (1977: 653). The latter term stresses that a person is constituted by social factors as much as by a physical body. Communicative resources are part of an individual's social and symbolic capital which help gain personal and social control. Today these kinds of capital are as essential as economic capital once used to be. Bourdieu (1991: 43) cites Auguste Comte's description of language as an inexhaustible treasure: "Language forms a kind of wealth, which all can make use of at once without causing any diminution of the store, and which thus admits a complete community of enjoyment; for all, freely participating in the general treasure, unconsciously aid in its preservation." Language is seen as an instrument of action and power, not as a static object. Bourdieu (1991: 170) explains the might of symbolic power and capital as follows:

Symbolic power - as a power constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization -

is a power that can be exercised only if it is recognized, that is, misrecognized as arbitrary.

Symbolic power has to be perceived as arbitrary by those who are dominated, because if the motives of the dominating class are recognised as having the particular aim to dominate other classes, their power to do so will crumble. It must seem natural that a particular group has the majority of the power in a society (symbolic and otherwise) or their credibility is undermined and the dominated protest.

Interactional linguistics places emphasis on the notion of intent, in particular how intent is interpreted by listeners in a context rather than the psychological issue of what the speaker has in mind. It is assumed that people are motivated to speak by some communicative intent; that is, they want to achieve something such as asking for a favour or some information or persuading a listener to do something, or just being sociable. Before speaking, the limitations imposed by the environment and how these affect particular people's right to speak must be determined. Each culture has a finite set of social environments which have certain rules about appropriate communicative behaviour (Blom & Gumperz 1972). These settings are determined by both universal and culturally specific criteria, so they vary from one group to another. Within a particular setting the speaker has to assess what social identities and relationships are in play among those present. These factors will determine what is said and how it is said.

Communicative tasks are realised as social practices in culturally distinct ways, even where the communicative tasks are universal; i.e. most people have to attend meetings or gatherings, negotiations of some kind, but the way in which the speech events are enacted is likely to differ culturally. This variation is attributed to three factors which may co-occur in practice (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982: 12):

- 1) Different cultural assumptions about the situation and about appropriate behaviour and intentions within it.

In general participants agree on the overall purpose of the interaction. However, politeness norms, what is expressed and what is left tacit, length of pauses etc. may be radically different, leading to misunderstanding, negative evaluation or dissatisfaction.

2) Different ways of structuring information or an argument in a conversation.

Frequently rhythmic and other discourse clues which highlight particular parts of an argument are missed in encounters between different groups, for example between Asians and Westerners. Scollon & Scollon (1995) among others, discuss the differences in structure which lead to misunderstanding in these situations.

3) Different way of speaking: the use of a different set of unconscious linguistic conventions (such as tone of voice) to emphasize, to signal logical connections and to indicate the significance of what is being said in terms of overall meaning and attitudes.

Cues at this level are linguistic and include grammar and lexicon as well as prosody and pause, idioms and formulaic expressions. These are all used to signal relevant information.

Speakers unfamiliar with particular cultural discourse features such as pitch, volume, lengthening of vowels, may view these as stylistic and not relevant to meaning. Therefore they have to interpret the discourse solely on semantic and grammatical information, which may mean that a great deal of meaning is lost. "[T]he linguistic conventions signalling communicative tasks, particularly the interplay of contextualizing and content signs, are much more sensitive to the ethnic and class backgrounds of participants than one might expect" (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982: 13).

For successful intercultural communication to take place, communicative flexibility is necessary. Speakers must be able to adapt their strategies to their audience in production

and reception. This requires an awareness of difference in communicative strategies. Without this speakers would judge one another on their own terms, often resulting in negative evaluations, continued miscommunication and eventually stereotyping and perpetuation of the problem. Scholars have found that many cues and postures which usually go unnoticed, have interactional, social significance. An important part of the signalling of attitude and intent is done through non-verbal communication and cross-cultural misunderstanding can result if the cues differ. Analysis has shown that the types of physical signals which play a communicative role can be arranged in three categories: (1) microsignals, which include eye blinks and the contraction of facial muscles; (2) proxemic signals such as gaze direction, posture and body orientation; and (3) complexes of signs that carry meaning in isolation, for example, winking, handshakes and nods. It has further been demonstrated that natural conversations are characterised by inter-speaker co-ordination of signals. (See Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982 for references to these studies.)

In order for these signals to be understood, there have to be some shared expectations in conversations. The signals which mark sharedness are known as contextualisation conventions. These are acquired through interactive experience and operate below the level of conscious choice. In addition, interpretive frames facilitate our understanding of interactions (Gumperz 1982b: 21):

Psychologists, sociolinguists and linguists concerned with understanding discourse all agree that interpretation of longer stretches of text involves simultaneous processing of information at several levels of generality. That is, in determining what is meant at any one point in a conversation, we rely on schemata or interpretive frames based on our experience with similar situations as well as on grammatical and lexical knowledge.

These interpretive frames include a knowledge of:

- (1) grammar and lexicon
- (2) suprasegmental features e.g. stress, intonation

- (3) pragmatic information e.g. appropriate turn-taking, ordering of information, admissible content, degree of respect or formality
- (4) knowledge of role relationships and speech activity e.g. whether it is joking or interviewing
- (5) knowledge of social correlations of speech varieties

In order to agree on a frame for a particular interaction, the speakers may have to do some negotiating. This might progress as follows: (1) Speaker A opens in a certain mode. (2) Speaker B indicates agreement or disagreement. (3) A conversational rhythm is established by the speakers working together. This co-ordination is known as interactive synchrony and can be distinguished from asynchrony where one person dominates and blocks the other, or both speakers speak at once or there are several uneasy pauses because neither speaker wishes to lead. All of these forms of asynchrony occur in intercultural interactions due to differing cultural norms regarding turn-taking, length of pause and so on. Cultures which deem long silences polite or necessary to conversation, for example, are frequently drowned out by those who feel uncomfortable with long pauses and fill them compulsively.

Tannen and Wallat (1993: 58) combine their perspectives as a linguist and social psychologist respectively to examine “the specifics of talk in interaction in a particular setting to provide a basis for understanding talk in terms of shifting frames.” Their study takes place in a paediatric setting and looks at both the stability of the social context and the variability of specific interactions which are shaped by the discourse. They argue that prior assumptions of the participants may be resistant to change within the interaction.

These prior assumptions or expectations have been much discussed in a variety of fields, including linguistics, psychology and anthropology. They have been variously labelled ‘frame’, ‘schema’, ‘script’, ‘prototype’, ‘speech activity’, ‘template’ and ‘module’. Tannen (1993) suggests that all these terms refer to structures of expectation. Tannen and Wallat (1993) choose two terms which capture the uses of the multitude of terms in this list:

'frames', which are frameworks of interpretation and 'schemas', which are knowledge structures. The term 'frame' was introduced by Bateson (1972/1987), an anthropologist, and was taken up by scholars in anthropology, sociology and linguistic anthropology. Notably in the last category were John Gumperz and Dell Hymes. The second category described by Tannen and Wallat (1993: 60) is 'schema'. They use the term 'knowledge schemas' (or simply 'schemas') to refer to "participants' expectations about people, objects, events and settings in the world, as distinguished from alignments being negotiated in a particular interaction". In other words, schemas are 'chunks' of knowledge which we have about aspects of the world, such as interviews, wild animals, foreigners and so on. Perhaps in a cross-cultural interaction such as an interview, the interviewee's knowledge schema does not match those of his interviewers' but they do not switch frames to accommodate this, because (a) they are unaware of the cultural gap or (b) they do not think it is their job to switch or (c) they think that the interviewee is rude, stupid, uncooperative etc. (See *Crosstalk* and Tannen 1993: 61-2 for examples).

Bateson (1972/1987) introduced the notion of frame to explain how individuals exchange signals that allow them to agree upon the discourse activity in which they are engaging or about to engage. In order to interpret an utterance in accordance with the way in which it was intended, it is necessary for the addressee to know what frame the speaker is operating in (and expects the addressee to be in as well). In other words, we have to try to understand whether a remark was intended as a joke, a jibe, a warning, a performance etc. The intention may differ according to the culture of the speaker. Frames are, therefore, culturally determined. This clearly has important implications for intercultural interactions. Bateson (1972/1987) describes two monkeys playing in a zoo. It is clear to him and the monkeys, that although they seem to be fighting, the fight is a play fight. The monkeys manage to signal to one another that the frame they are engaged in is 'play' not 'combat' and both interpret the frame of 'play' in the same way: "The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 1987: 180). People are constantly faced with this sort of interpretive task and major problems of misunderstanding and disagreement can arise if speaker and listener are not in sync, or do

not see the frame of their interaction in the same way. Participants of different cultural backgrounds, in particular, encounter difficulties when attempting to negotiate a context and reach an understanding, as there is a mismatch of frames and expectations. As a result intercultural encounters are frequently asynchronous: Participants interpret the interaction differently and are often left with negative impressions of the other (Chick 1995).

Bourdieu (1991: 38) adds to the understanding of frames: It is necessary to take cognisance of the fact that "...the linguistic product is only completely realized as a message if it is treated as such, that is to say, if it is decoded, and the associated fact that the schemes of interpretation used by those receiving the message in their creative appropriation of the product offered may diverge, to a greater or lesser extent, from those which guided its production." This will often be the case in cross-cultural encounters.

Bourdieu (1991) uses the term linguistic 'product' to suggest that language is 'offered' on a market like any other product. He proposes that linguistic products have value only on a market. Their value fluctuates according to the market on which they are presented and the demand on that market for such a product. The analogy is of a simple economic exchange. "...the market plays a part in shaping not only the symbolic value but also the meaning of discourse" (Bourdieu 1991: 38). He continues by saying that it is not 'language' which circulates on the market, but rather a range of stylistically distinct discourses "marked both in their production, in so far as each speaker fashions an idiolect from the common language, and in their reception, in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience" (1991: 39). Bourdieu points out that communication between classes (or ethnic or cultural groups) is always the most charged, because words then carry all their social connotations with them and are open to a range of interpretations. "Each word, each expression threatens to take on two antagonistic senses, reflecting the way in which it is perceived by sender and receiver" (1991: 40). To put it another way, a word which may seem innocent may be understood in quite a different way from that in which it was intended. Bourdieu gives the example of *soigne*

meaning 'neat, clean, conscientious', often used approvingly by the petit-bourgeois. However, the same word when used by intellectuals refers to all that is petit-bourgeois, petty and mean-spirited. Such traps are thick on the ground in intercultural settings.

At the same time that participants frame events, they negotiate the interpersonal relationships that constitute those events. All this requires proficiency in the language and culture of the situation. As a result, communicators from different cultures may have difficulties understanding all that is going on and getting across their own meanings.

Watanabe (1993) raises the point that frames are culturally specific and members of differing cultural groups are likely to have different expectations about a given speech event. If two people from different cultures meet and do not share the same expectations of how to (inter)act in the situation, "it is possible that differing interpretations of the situated meaning of what is said are processed by the interactants" (Watanabe 1993: 179). It may appear at first that they have understood each other, but it is quite likely that it will later become apparent that they each left with their own interpretation and the two did not correspond.

Sharing conversational strategies creates a feeling of satisfaction with an act of communication because speakers feel understood. This may also lead to a sense of belonging and therefore shared identity. The converse is true when conversational strategies are not shared because misunderstanding and consequently dissonance and a feeling of not belonging result. "This is the sense in which conversational style is a major component of what we have come to call ethnicity" (Tannen 1982: 12).

#### **2.5.4 Methods of Interactional Sociolinguistic Research**

The type of data used for interactionist studies are verbal interactions and usually involve participants from differing social or ethnic backgrounds. Their aim is to discover differences in communicative strategies and how these are interpreted. Because these phenomena are difficult to document and analyse, interactionists try to gain qualitative

insights. The analysis therefore emphasises in-depth interpretive methods rather than relying on survey techniques. Events that provide interesting material include interviews, courtroom hearings, public debates and discussions, negotiations and so on. In all of these situations, though “an air of equality, mutuality and cordiality” (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982: 9) may prevail on the surface, participant rights and obligations are determined or constrained by the environment, and frequently a power asymmetry is hidden beneath the surface. These situations are, as a result, particularly difficult for members of minority groups because they may have a different understanding or expectation of the proceedings. In order to understand and evaluate a situation from a member’s perspective, the researcher needs to know what participants’ aims and expectations are in addition to observing what happens.

This can be achieved by becoming fully involved with the subjects of study and familiar with the environments in which they interact (those of interest to the study). In some cases it is not possible to record actual situations. Experience with a wide range of natural situations can serve as a basis for recreating realistic experiments. Participants from various groups can be asked to re-enact an interview, for example, in a constructed situation. If the participants are familiar with the situation from personal experience and the script is not too carefully predetermined, rhetorical strategies embedded in participants’ practices are likely to emerge (as in Crosstalk).

In analysis, three perspectives are used to examine communication:

- 1) Language usage: verbal practices, repetition and accentuation patterns
- 2) Inferencing: interactive mechanisms used by participants to jointly arrive at interpretations
- 3) Evaluation of the way in which participants reflexively address the social activity that is being constituted by their ongoing talk

Each of these is carefully analysed to find possible communication breakdown and to determine how expectations are confirmed or disconfirmed.

The SPEAKING grid is an analytic framework which has been used extensively when analysing data. Hymes (1972) explains that the components of speech can be grouped together under the acronym SPEAKING. Hymes suggests that traditional models which include only three components of speech - speaker, hearer and something spoken about - are inadequate and need to be substantially expanded. Ethnographic material is cited as evidence that up to sixteen or seventeen components sometimes have to be distinguished. These may not all be relevant simultaneously and there may be redundancies, but since each component may be a factor, it is included in the SPEAKING grid.

Message form (1) and message content (2) together are components of the act sequence (A) and are tightly interdependent: “How something is said is part of what is said” (Hymes 1972: 59) Content includes topic, topic changes and coherence of discourse through managing of topic change.

Setting (S) is the unmarked term chosen to stand mnemonically for setting (3) and scene (4). Setting is the time, place and general circumstances of the speech act, whereas scene is the psychological setting which depends on the cultural definition of an occasion. These terms can be illustrated with reference to theatre sets on which several scenes can be played out, although the scenes may be at different times or places.

Speaker or sender (5); addresser (6); hearer, receiver or audience (7) and addressee (8) are all grouped together as participants of discourse (P). This term is intended to include an audience which hears an interaction but does not participate, yet still has an effect on the interaction. A child listening to adults talking, for example, may cause the adults to adjust their language and perhaps speak in code (using long words etc.). It also allows for someone who is speaking but not addressing anyone directly to be seen as a participant in discourse (Hymes 1972: 61).

Ends (**E**) is a fortuitously ambiguous term, which includes outcomes (9) and goals (10), i.e. ends achieved and ends in view. Both are important because the expected outcomes shape the way speech events are realised, and the goals of interactants, which may be complimentary or opposing, lead to more or less synchronous encounters.

Key (11) is the tone, manner or spirit in which an act is done, roughly equivalent to modality. The key (**K**) of an interaction may be signalled in a number of ways: either non-verbally with winks, gestures, posture, dress etc. or verbally using for example, volume and length.

The medium of transmission of speech (e.g. oral, written, telegraphic) is known as the channel (12) (see also Jakobson 1960/1972). This is grouped with the forms of speech (13), that is, the language or dialect chosen, the register and the mutual intelligibility. Together these are the agencies or means of speaking, the instrumentalities (**I**).

Norms of interaction (14) and norms of interpretation (15) govern speaking and interpretation respectively. Rules for speaking include guidelines on interrupting, volume, turn allocation and implicate an analysis of the social structure and social relationships generally in a community. Rules for interpretation may still differ from culture to culture. Relations between groups are often affected by misunderstandings in such cases. These two kinds of norms may be grouped together (**N**).

Genres (16) are categories such as poem, sermon, tale, riddle, curse, lecture, editorial, advertisement. Even casual 'unmarked' speech has features which can be recognised, particularly if used in unexpected ways or in unusual circumstances (Hymes 1972: 65). Generally genres (**G**) are recognised by formal features.

When examining the communicative patterns of any community, the local taxonomy must be determined and used as a guide. Any shift or change in a component of speech can be thought of as a potentially relevant and interesting contrast. The set of

components should also be used negatively to establish which categories are not relevant. The implications of omissions should then be checked.

All the theories discussed in this chapter can be useful in analysis. Bearing in mind that speakers are likely to make use of speech convergence if they want to create a favourable impression, or that they switch to a marked code to signal a challenge to the accepted balance of rights and obligations adds to our understanding of interactions. Politeness theory and face needs are very telling when attempting to determine speakers' motivations, as are micro-signals, proxemic signals and signs such as nods and winks. It is also interesting to examine the strategies used by speakers at different levels on the company or social hierarchy: in some cases their power and status seem to be irrelevant and in other instances the importance of power is clear. Chapter Five will look at the norms that govern participants' interactions in particular frames, particularly with regard to power and politeness practices. How interactions are affected by the desire to be liked or approved of, the aims of the interaction and the relationships among participants will also be addressed.

## CHAPTER THREE: Business Structures

### 3.1 Introduction

In order to study intercultural communication in organisations, it is necessary to have some understanding of organisational structures and management styles. Organisational structures determine factors such as the division of labour, the centralisation of authority and the degree of formality within the organisation. These in turn shape the managers' roles. The roles and behaviour of managers are likely to have a significant impact on (intercultural) communication within an organisation, because they are in a position to influence other workers, and their attitudes towards others may determine the type of communication that occurs. This chapter will look at some of the management styles in South Africa and assess the implications of the different styles for successful intercultural communication within organisations. In so doing it creates the context for my case study of CTC.

An organisation can be roughly defined as a group of people working together to achieve a specific goal; usually one which the individuals who make up the organisation could not achieve working alone.

Although there are a number of major types of organisation and management styles, fashion affects the management industry. Victor Hugo (1852: conclusion) wrote, "You can resist an invading army; you cannot resist an idea whose time has come." At least it seems no modern manager can resist an idea, and ideas frequently come and go. This is the era of management trends that appear and disappear as fast as their inventors can think of new catch phrases with varying degrees of value, or even meaning. Shelley once said that poets were the 'unacknowledged legislators of mankind'; today the authors of The Witch Doctors claim that management theorists deserve the honour of this title: "wherever we look, management theorists are laying down the law, reshaping institutions, refashioning

our language<sup>1</sup>and, above all, reorganising people's lives" (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 1997: 5). The problem is that they are not all laying down the same law, nor even sticking to their own laws for very long. Management theory is riddled with contradictions and apparently vacuous observations or advice.

Nasser & Vivier (1995: 18) believe that the greatest fad era in business was the 1980s.

"The '90s appear to be a period in which organisations will become a lot more pragmatic and realistic than they were in the trendy '80s. In the '80s management fads were the order of the day and had sweeping impact on organisations throughout the country."

Whether this has turned out to be true is a highly debatable topic. Writing in 1997, Micklethwait & Wooldridge comment on more recent trends and discuss "The Fad in Progress: Re-engineering" in their first chapter. It is hard to decide whether new ideas and catchy terms are still in power, or whether managers are becoming more self-sufficient and relying increasingly on their own experience and expertise to change with the changing times.

### 3.2 Communication

Before looking more closely at organisations, this section will examine some of the definitions of communication which have been suggested in the contexts of business and linguistics. If we are to study communication, defining it is essential. However, like culture, it is not a concept easily captured in a single brief definition. As an introduction to organisations, it is interesting to note some of the definitions of communication which have been proposed by authors writing about successful communication in organisational settings. Titles of books include Job Involvement and Communications (Smith 1973), Management Principles (Smit & Cronje 1992), Effective Communication in Organisations (Fielding 1993), Getting it Right - The Manager's Guide to Business Communication (Adey & Andrew 1990). These authors believe that they know what communication is and

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<sup>1</sup> The effect of management theory on language will not be pursued in detail in this work, but the changes that have taken place, particularly in English, would make a very interesting study.

how it should be managed in business. In some cases it took little more than a glance to realise they were mistaken. Some of the definitions I found are given below:

(1) Communication “is a process involving the acquisition and use of information for planning, organizing, leading and controlling. ... [I]n its simplest form ... [it] involves a communicator, a message and at least one person who is the recipient of the message” (Smit & Cronje 1992:354). The authors add that the intention of the communicator is important and that there are broadly three objectives: to inform, to persuade and to remind.

(2) Fielding (1993:7) lists three different major functions of communication in an organisation:

- “Ensuring that products and services are of the best.”
- “Helping staff generate new ideas and adapt to changes.”
- “Ensuring that the staff work well together, understand the organization’s objectives and work to achieve these objectives.”

His definition suggests greater complexity and is more in line with linguistic theories (1993: 3): “Communication is defined as a transaction. People work together to create meaning by exchanging symbols. They have to do this according to a set of rules and in order to succeed they have to share the same (or at least very similar) meanings when they use words, gestures or patterns of interaction. Communication is essential to the survival of organizations....”

(3) Adey & Andrew (1990) define communication with the model on the next page. They add that the communication process consists of the four steps of attention, apprehension, assimilation and action. The first step, fairly obviously, involves getting the attention of your audience. This may require showing interest in them, responding honestly to them and giving them your attention. Next, you have to ascertain whether or not they have understood your message. Indirect means for doing this are recommended.

Assimilation is acceptance and absorption, reaching a consensus. At this stage the authors point out that communication is a reciprocal process and both parties must involve themselves in continuously negotiating. However, a limitation of this model is that it does not seem to allow for contestation or disagreement; acceptance is the only option. Finally, they believe action should follow successful communication.

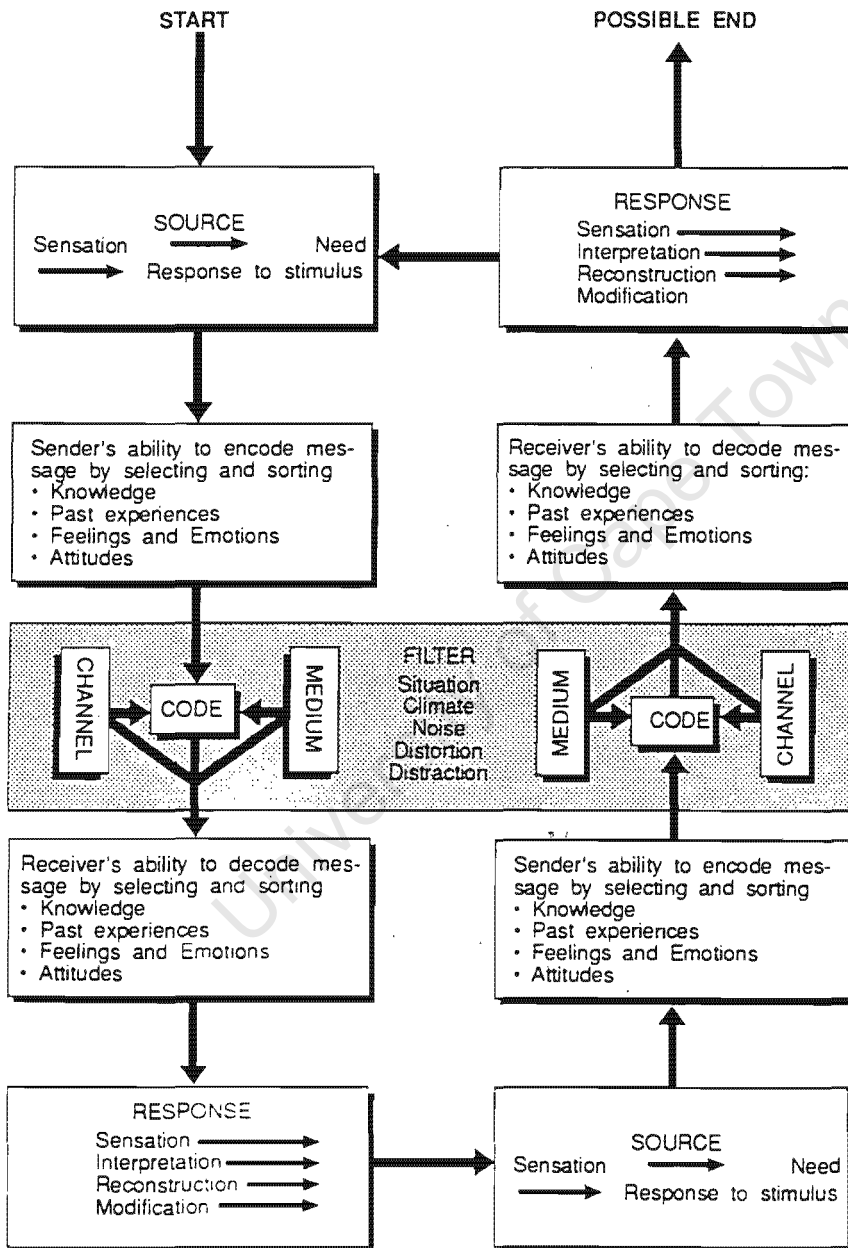


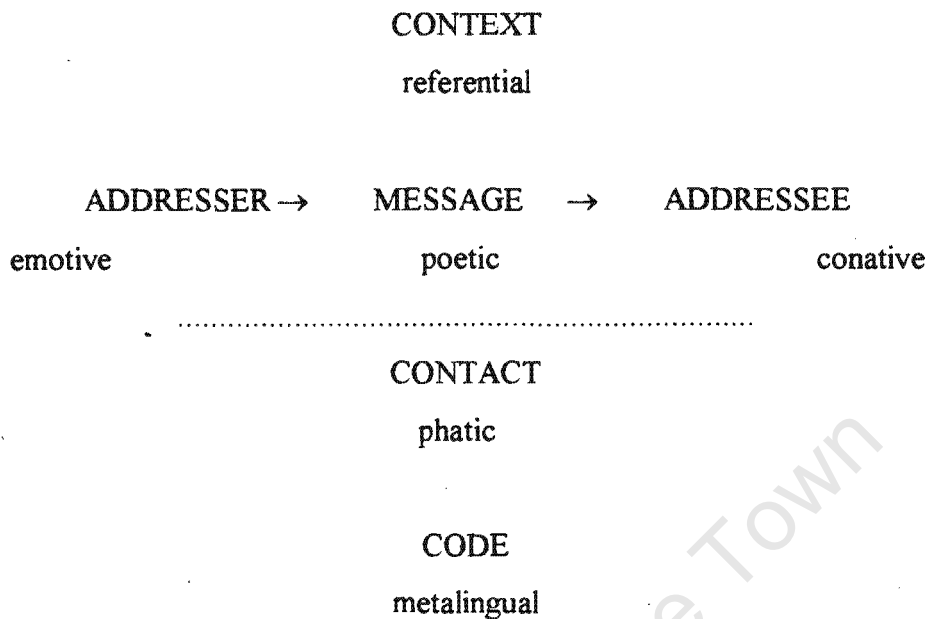
Fig. 3.1: A model of communication (Adey & Andrew 1990: 8)

Inherent characteristics of the communicator influence the way in which messages are perceived. The sender must have credibility if the message is to be accepted. Factors which provide credibility include skill, status and appearance. These may vary in importance according to the message and the sender.

In general it is easy to see why so many businesses are having trouble communicating effectively at all, let alone across cultures! These definitions in general are over simplified and limited. Authors take note of only a small part of the communication process and in many cases do not acknowledge factors such as non-verbal cues, prosody and intonation and culturally specific frames which define what interlocutors expect in particular types of situations. In addition, some authors limit the functions of communication in organisation to only three. These do not include functions such as socialising or making contact with colleagues as people, or asking questions of any kind. Both of these are extremely important to workers as people: casual interactions make them relax and feel secure in the work environment; questions are essential to ensuring understanding and successful completion of tasks. (However, it should be noted that writing on business communication is constrained by addressing the general public rather than a specialist academic audience.)

Some of these functions are discussed by linguists. Roman Jakobson (1960/1972) shows how the components of a speech event relate to the functions of language. In his famous model various functions of language are considered, not just those which are useful at work or which refer to the environment. Before examining the functions of language, Jakobson deems it necessary to look briefly at the constitutive elements of every speech act. The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to an ADDRESSEE. The message depends on a particular CONTEXT referred to; a CODE which is at least partly common to addresser and addressee; and a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the interactants. Each of these factors determines a different function of language, but it is rare for a verbal message to fulfil only one function. "The diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions" (Jakobson 1972: 90). The figure below shows how the functions

(lower case) of language are linked to the factors (upper case) involved in verbal communication:



**Fig. 3.2: Factors involved in verbal communication (after Jakobson 1972)**

The **referential** function of language relates the interactants to their environment as they make reference to it. By referring to extralinguistic reality, information is transferred. The **emotive** (or 'expressive') function is linked to the addresser as it aims at direct expression of the speaker's attitude to what is being spoken about. The **conative** (also 'directive') function is oriented towards the addressee. It includes imperatives and vocatives, addressing or invoking the listener. The **phatic** function has primarily to do with establishing or maintaining contact ("So, here we are...") and checking whether the channels works ("Can you hear me?"). Ritualised formulas are commonly used to this end. Whenever the addresser and/ or addressee feels the need to make sure that they are using the same code, **metalingual** expressions are used. These make specific reference to the code and check meanings ("What do you mean?" or "Do you understand?"). Finally, focus on the message itself, for its own sake, is the **poetic** function of language. This is not limited to poetry and nor is it the only function employed in poetry, but this is where it

dominates. In day to day language, the poetic function is seen in the adjectives chosen to describe people (“hilarious Heathcliff” rather than “funny” or “amusing”), the order of words in a phrase (“fun and laughter” but not “laughter and fun”) and so on. Advertising makes wide use of this function of language in devising catchy jingles and irresistible brand names.

Michael Halliday (1985) proposes that all language performs three functions simultaneously. He calls these the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language. These three functions provide a scheme for classifying linguistic structures according to their communicative roles. The **ideational** or experiential function of language serves to represent phenomena in the real world. Through this function speakers (or writers) can also convey their experience of these phenomena, including their reactions, perceptions and understanding of the external and internal worlds. We use the experiential function of language for “representing the real world as it is apprehended in our experience” (Halliday 1989: 19). The **interpersonal** function of language plays a role in the process of social interaction. An utterance is not only a representation of reality; “it is also a piece of interaction between speaker and listener” (Halliday 1989: 20). This function allows the speaker to communicate the role s/he has adopted and his/ her perceived relationship with the listener. The expression of the speaker’s attitudes and evaluations are also part of this function of language. The third function is instrumental to the other two as it enables language to meet the demands of representation and interaction. This function is concerned with the creation of text: the semantics and grammar, the thematic structure, the rhythm and information focus. This **textual** function makes discourse possible because the speaker can produce a text and the listener can recognise one (Halliday 1989)<sup>2</sup>.

Some authors have noted that other factors also affect the transmission and reception of the message (see for example Adey & Andrew 1990; Fielding 1993; Jackson 1993). Most

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<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere Halliday (1974) discusses several more specific functions of language as they are used by a child. These functions include instrumental, heuristic and metalinguistic uses of language.

factors which hinder communication may be grouped together under the label 'noise'. Noise is any kind of interference, whether it be physically perceived or psychological. Often the message is encoded or decoded inadequately or inappropriately for the communicative demands of the moment, particularly when the interlocutors have differing frames of reference as a result of cultural differences or other misalignments. This is likely to influence their communication, possibly causing misunderstanding, frustration or even anger. Poor listening or inattention can cause misunderstanding; technical language or inappropriate jargon, a badly structured message, too little information and so on, make decoding the message difficult for the listener; and any ungrounded assumptions or differing perceptions of one another or the situation make clear communication unlikely.

As discussed in Chapter Two, speakers may formulate messages according to differing conventions, thus violating the expectations of listeners from another culture. This might also cause confusion or negative evaluation of the speaker's style or organisation of information. The listener may pay particular attention to parts of the message which fit into his/her frame of reference, ignoring parts which seem unusual or conflict with what s/he knows. These include intonation, information ordering and pronunciation. Naturally, misinterpretation of such factors can result in further communication problems.

Halliday (1978: 8 – 9) observes a shift that has taken place towards focusing on people in their social rather than physical environment. In an earlier book he remarks that "in a coherent social theory a central place is occupied by language, as the primary means of cultural transmission" and that "[a] significant fact about the behaviour of human beings in relation to their social environment is that a large part of it is linguistic behaviour. The study of social man [sic] presupposes the study of language and social man" (1974: 48). This social aspect of our environment is much harder to manage as we cannot rely on physical engineering. "The rubbish creep, the contamination of air and water, even the most lethal processes of physical pollution appear to be more tractable than the pollution in the social environment that is caused by prejudice and animosity of race, culture and class. These cannot be engineered away" (Halliday 1978: 8 - 9). Education can affect the

social environment, but it does not often do so by aiming to change the social structures; instead it trains children to become social beings able to function in the given environment. The pollution that slips through the educational net, is left for society to cure. In many cases retraining of adults is necessary, particularly as diversity in organisations becomes commonplace.

According to Webb, human resources director at CTC, culturally-bound differences in communicative behaviour must not be ignored or underestimated, but at the same time they should not be over-emphasised to the extent that any similarities are overlooked (personal communication: October 1998). Ethnocentrism, seeing the world only from one's own cultural viewpoint, can be damaging to intercultural relations. Jackson (1993) draws attention to the fact that in the past many tribes throughout the world chose the word for 'people' or 'human' as the name of their tribe. For them, they are the definitive 'people'; they see the world from within their culture.

### **3.3 Organisational structures and designs**

Fielding (1993) refers to two broad types of organisations: tall and flat structures.

Communication flow is one of the major distinguishing features. Tall structures are hierarchical and power is centralised in a small group of managers who have tight control over their subordinates. Departments are generally functionally distinguished, i.e. each department has a particular function, such as attending to marketing or financial matters, rather than dealing with an entire process. There is a high risk of messages being distorted in the transmission process as they have to pass through multiple layers in order to reach their target in most cases. Managers and subordinates do not communicate directly and much clarity is lost in the reproduction and repetition of a message.

Flat structures are less hierarchical and there is less managerial control. Responsibility tends to be shared among employees; in other words, power is decentralised. There is less

potential for distortion as paths are open for direct communication, but perhaps the risk of conflict among equals is greater.

Smit & Cronje (1992) describe four organisational designs which vary in terms of hierarchical ordering and the centralisation of power: these are classical, bureaucratic, neo-classical and matrix organisations. Classic organisational design is characterised by a high degree of complexity, centralisation and formalisation. Power is centralised in a small group at the top of a pyramid. Each worker should report only to one superior, with this unity of command continuing up the ladder. An employee's authority, or place on the ladder, should correspond to his responsibility. Tasks are classified according to function and grouped together in departments. Work may be distributed and redistributed so long as economic efficiency is maintained.

The bureaucratic approach to organisation design focuses on a clear division of labour, so that well-defined tasks can be carefully explained and clearly understood, allowing for specialisation. The hierarchy is formalised and relationships between managers and subordinates and among managers are precisely defined. Specific rules, policy and procedures are always in force and affect each employee's behaviour. These also apply to remuneration and discipline and therefore preclude bias or unfair judgement. Fixed and fair criteria are used for making appointments to vacant posts, thus ensuring that applicants are appointed on merit. The major advantage of this model is that it improves the organisation's efficiency as a result of the division of labour and employment on the basis of expertise and fixed rules. However, there are several disadvantages in its fixed rigidity. This type of design tends to ignore human and social processes and does not allow much for individual problems or needs. The design assumes unrealistic loyalty and impersonal relationships as well as expecting obedience from subordinates. In addition the bureaucratic processes can be time consuming and at times inappropriate. There is no need to elaborate on the frustration one experiences when the execution of a simple task depends on the filling in of several forms in triplicate (for example, in dealings with Telkom, the post office, government departments or a university).

The neo-classic organisational design evolved as a result of the shortcomings of the classic and bureaucratic approaches. It is less formal, with fewer rules and regulations and communication flows more freely in all directions. Employees are encouraged to voice their opinions and can expect that managers will be willing to listen. Authority is spread over a fairly broad base and there are fewer subsystems. Uncertainty, instability, technology and strategic matters are taken into account by this type of design, thus making it far more suitable for the rapidly changing modern business world. Individuals are seen as unique, creative, productive beings with their own social and personal goals. This design contrasts with classical design as it has low degrees of complexity, formality and centralisation.

Smit & Cronje (1992) label four organisational designs 'system 1' through 'system 4'. These designs vary in terms of power centralisation, levels of interaction and communication flow. System 4, like the neo-classical design, is a suitable design in changing environments where stability and certainty are low. Emphasis is placed in system 4 organisations on trust and confidence, participation and open and extensive interaction. Decision-making occurs at all levels of the organisation and is decentralised; participation in goal setting is also encouraged. Information flows up, down and laterally, with managers listening to the ideas and problems of subordinates. This contrasts sharply with system 1 organisations which resemble classic structures with rigid hierarchies in place and downward only communication.

"The matrix organisation design achieves equilibrium in that horizontal structure of authority, influence and communication is applied over a vertical structure" (Smit & Cronje 1992: 225). That is, the matrix design combines the advantages of functional specialisation and product or project specialisation. Members of departments can be assigned to specialist projects, while retaining their status as members of that department. Although this allows workers to be used to the best advantage of the organisation, it can lead to frustration and conflict, as an employee is often expected to be responsible to two

superiors. Teams are composed on a temporary basis to develop certain components of a project. These task-based teams are becoming increasingly popular as the need for technological specialisation and development increases (van Veijeren 1977: 62). Managers work outside the matrix but manage conflict and balance power between functional and product departments. They also set goals and standards, although they have less power than their counterparts in functionally organised structures. The major advantage of this type of structure is the increased flexibility and contact between matrices which allows for rapid flow of information and a mix of opinions and expertise.

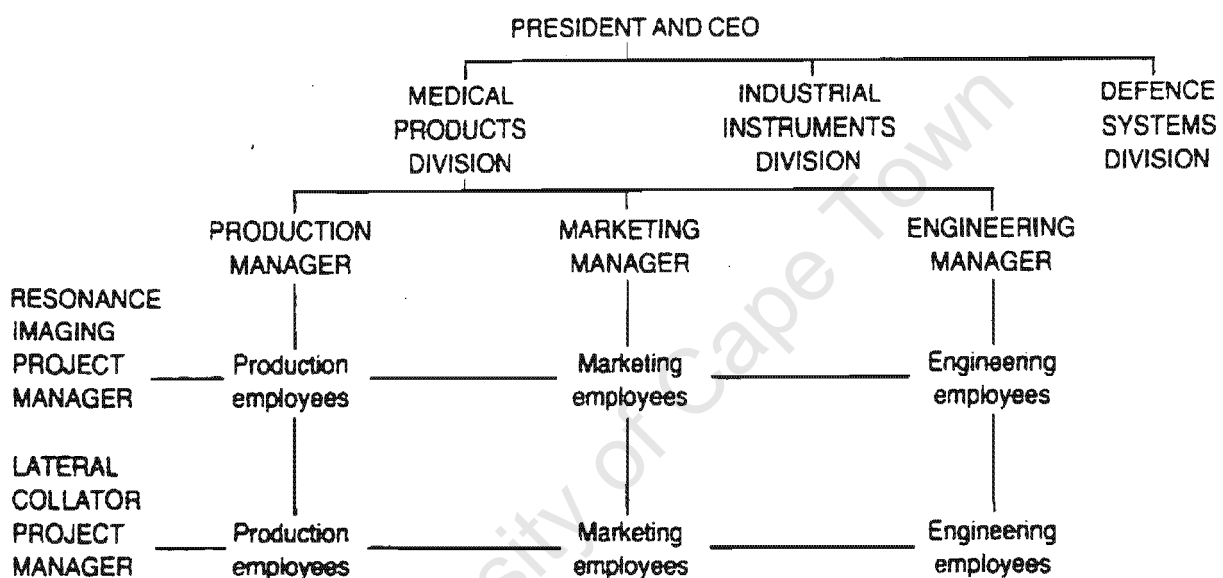


Fig. 3.3: The matrix design in a medical products firm (from Dailey 1992)

### 3.4 Managerial types

Within these organisational designs there are different types of managers. According to Lessem (1989) there are broadly four types of managers: pragmatic, rational, developmental and humanist managers. Christie (1996) draws an analogy between these types of management and the development of a human being. Body, mind, heart and soul become symbols of different approaches to management and of the development of the organisation to 'maturity'. Each type of management is appropriate at a particular stage,

but in order for the company to remain competitive, it needs to move through the stages and not become rigidly fixed in one of them.

Lessem's (1989) **pragmatic** manager is the manager of the western world, particularly the USA. Getting rich and getting results are the major motivators for pragmatic managers. They are pragmatic, competitive and always ready to make a deal. They are willing to work hard and do so enthusiastically, with an instinct for the market, the ability to improvise and a fair amount of imagination. They love their customers, who are their reasons for being, and hate their enemies with equal vehemence.

Christie (1996) suggests that 'primal' managers (his term) emphasise the physical body of the organisation and are physical and action-oriented in much the same way as a boy or young man: Their bodies (experience and sensation) are foremost in their minds. An organisation's body is fed with money; a financially successful organisation has directors who are "fat and happy" (Christie 1996:109). Primal managers show their physicality through hard work, making friends with colleagues, learning through experience and avoiding lectures, getting involved (and getting their hands dirty) rather than always delegating. Such managers will sacrifice anything to make a success of their careers.

The **rational** manager is far more analytic and favours procedures and processes. Everything and everyone has a place and a role to fulfil. These managers practise the science of management, using principles of division of labour, standardisation and specialisation. They are systematic, planning processes in logical sequence, organising and controlling. Rational managers are characteristic of the North, particularly French-Germanic Europe, and are most at home in bureaucratic organisations.

Christie (1996) correlates rational managers with conceptual mind of the organisation. The rational manager is like the university student who concentrates harder on getting an education than on meeting people or having fun. Efficiency, clear objectives and well-defined processes are the pride and joy of rational managers. They understand and use

technology effectively and value academic achievement and training in their staff. They aim to sustain the mind of the organisation, that is, the technology and procedures which create order within the organisation. Progress up the corporate ladder must be accompanied by appropriate professional training or qualifications; merely accumulating experience is not sufficient.

**Developmental** managers are also called 'eastern managers' as Easterners seem to choose this style of management. "This approach to management relies on the two fundamental beliefs of holism and interdependence" (Christie 1996: 19). Holism, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (eighth edition, 1990), is "the theory that certain wholes are to be regarded as greater than the sum of their parts". Quality control circles (discussed in the next chapter), also inherited from the East, are a typical feature at this stage in an organisation's development. The developmental style of management differs from rationalism in that it assumes parts of an object cannot be analysed and used to understand the object; the object must be viewed and understood as a whole. This can be applied in business by looking at a product in terms of its production and marketing, for example, without attempting to separate these areas from one another: The product should be manufactured in such a way as to meet market requirements as exactly as possible; the two areas are interdependent.

The developmental manager relates to the social heart of the organisation. According to Christie (1996) a human being's heart frequently only comes into its own later in life when that being begins to (or yearns to) settle down and form lasting relationships.

Developmental managers lead from the heart, and are respected by peers, subordinates and superiors. They recognise that people are not happy only being cogs, and therefore encourage multi-skilling so that one person can be a whole wheel. Such managers treat everyone fairly and equally, encouraging teamwork and co-operation. They are aware that an organisation needs to accommodate its managers and workers as social beings. They manage conflict well and strive to develop the potential of others as well as attending to

their own development. A neo-classical organisational environment would suit such a manager.

And finally there are the **humanist** managers of the South who are concerned with the management of corporate culture and value sharing. Theirs is a communal world with groups of people at its centre. To put it more radically, this implies managing the supernatural forces within an organisation. Humanist managers place importance on values, beliefs, symbols, rituals and stories. Meaning is very important to these managers and motivates them more than money does. However, by focusing on aspects of the organisation which cannot be measured, they can make a material difference to capital, work processes and so on. They aim to attach meaning to the organisation and clarify its aims and reasons for being.

Christie (1996) describes this domain of management as the spiritual soul of the organisation. The 'metaphysical' manager (his term) is concerned with the meaning and value of the organisation within society. "What do we stand for?" becomes an important question at this stage in the organisation's development. Metaphysical managers are "people's people"; they socialise and get on with staff, clients, suppliers. They are natural leaders, visible and accessible to all. They believe in managing people's emotions as much as any other resources. The principle of ubuntuism (discussed later in this chapter) is a particular example of managing according to southern humanism. A particular South African wholesaler of building materials on a cash and carry basis, is an example of a successful, profitable organisation which has embraced the ideals of humanist management. "Our greatest resource ... is our people, and we believe that our caring organisation has created an unbelievably trusting atmosphere in which human beings feel motivated and can develop their full potential" (Koopman et al. 1987: 87).

In South Africa, the north-western styles of pragmatic and rational management dominate, while the contributions of the south and east are neglected. All four worlds are represented in the multicultural heritage of this country and need to be exploited in order

to achieve success, “[f]or world-class performance will only result when a particular organisation draws upon the real diversity within our rainbow nation” (Christie 1996: 21).

Jackson (1993: 157-158) summarises Lessem’s (1989) typology of management and organisational styles as follows:

Lessem looks at the evolution of business and management over time and across the globe... He looks at Entrepreneurial management (the early stage of a company’s development and typified in the West); Executive or Rational management as a second, bureaucratic stage typified in the North, but also borrowing heavily from literature and business schools in the West; Developmental management, often a third stage to break down bureaucracy and develop quality, and typified in the East; and finally Transformational or Metaphysical management aimed at higher ideals, and being a final, but continuing stage, which is typified in a few international companies and possibly in the South.

West	North	East	South
Time →			
<b>Profit</b>	<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Higher Ideals</b>
Entrepreneurial	Executive	Developmental	Transformational

**Fig. 3.4: Management results and organisational culture (Jackson 1993: 158)**

### 3.5 Corporate Culture

The term ‘corporate culture’ refers to the values and beliefs shared by the people in an organisation. These give the organisation a particular character and determine the activities of that organisation to a large extent. Organisational or corporate culture and management style often overlap and inform each other. Managers shape their leadership style in accordance with the culture within the organisation. They follow explicit and implicit rules about what is expected and pass these on through their example and their

attitude towards the business, colleagues, clients and so on. Culture is often described as being weak or strong, particularly in the organisational context. This refers to the extent to which the values and beliefs within the organisation are defined, accepted and adhered to by members of the organisation.

Jackson (1993:154) provides a link between corporate culture and societal culture by pointing out that in both cases rules are made by a group (often derived from experience within that group) and become the norms which govern the group's behaviour. The group may be a society or an organisation. Groups need rules, a culture which unites them, in order to live or work together effectively. When the rules are ignored or no longer seem to make sense within a particular context, the group has to reconsider them or it is likely to splinter, perhaps losing important individuals<sup>3</sup>.

A good corporate culture helps an organisation move towards its objectives rather than away from them. It has a high degree of penetration and means something to all members of the organisation, although the values it has for each person may differ. It also exerts pressure on the members of the organisation to behave in a particular way. For maximum effectiveness, required and actual behaviour of members should match, so that the employees' personal objectives and the enterprise's objectives coincide to some extent.

Smit & Cronje (1992) list four major types of culture found in organisations, corresponding to the four organisational designs: power culture, person culture, role culture (bureaucracy) and job culture. The **power culture** is associated with a centralised power base and highly political organisation, usually found in classical organisational design. It is often successful, but morale may be low, particularly in lower levels of the enterprise, and staff turn-over is frequently high. The **role culture** places emphasis on functional specialisation and rules and procedures, i.e. bureaucracy. This logical and rational approach is successful in stable environments and gives employees the benefits of

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<sup>3</sup> The link between recent changes in the national culture in South Africa and the emigration of young professionals could be an interesting topic for future research.

security, predictability of progress (promotions etc.) and opportunities to acquire skills and special knowledge. The **person culture** views the individual as the pivot on which the organisation turns and subordinates the organisation to the individuals within it. Such a culture's control mechanisms can only succeed if there is mutual agreement. This type of culture is often associated with neo-classical organisations. The **job culture** relies on co-operation among individuals and groups with different expertise; the focus is on getting the job done. It is a team culture, encouraging group decision-making and allowing employees greater control over their own work. This type of culture is successful where sensitivity and flexibility are important in the market and may be seen most commonly in matrix organisations.

In South Africa, with markets changing more rapidly than ever and international management trends affecting us as much as the rest of the world, elements of the last two types are useful: flexibility is essential to keep up with changing times; and respecting human resources and recognising their importance, keeps them motivated and working to keep the company afloat. These ideas are compatible with *ubuntuism*, the current buzzword in South African management. The term was introduced by African philosophers in the early 1950s and later used by Steve Biko in the 1970's (Jordaan et al. 1999: 10). The concept was made popular by a local artist in one of her songs: Brenda Fassie sang "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*", roughly 'a person is a person through other people'. This concept is strongly opposed to the idea of individualism prevalent in Western culture and management (Adey & Andrew 1990).

Jordaan et al. (1999: 10), of *The Big Issue* magazine, believe that "[t]his ethno-philosophy is the one fundamental value that all Africans share, regardless of tribal origin". Albert Koopman (cited in Lessem & Nussbaum 1996: 44), in ten years of experience in a South African co-operative, observed that "the African work group regarded their fellows primarily in terms of morals and emotions rather than in terms of roles and functions." Ubuntu is seen as a constant across several African cultures; a convivial, communal way of being, practised by the Blacks of southern Africa and poorly understood by the Whites.

Story telling plays a very important part in many African cultures. The main element of the reasoning process is “continuous debate and argument” (Lessem & Nussbaum 1996: 44) which should continue until a consensus is reached. Thus, imposing a decision on workers is likely to lead to dissent and probably failure to carry it out. Therefore many Africans are accustomed to using the spoken word freely, incorporating metaphors and stories in all areas of their lives. Stories are traditionally used to teach children values and appropriate behaviour; they must learn to be good people, to live according to the principles of ubuntu. They are used to monitor the community and to remember history and its heroes. Creativity and dramatic delivery are highly valued and make the stories wonderful to listen to, time after time. “To encourage this kind of storytelling releases the innate creative powers of young people, and this can only bode well for a growing economy” (Lessem & Nussbaum 1996: 73).

The philosophy of ubuntu states that no one can be self-sufficient, but that everyone is part of a network of interdependence. This requires a great deal of learning and sharing. In the workplace this can be achieved by greater interaction among people and less emphasis on power structures. However, it is no simple matter changing to the ubuntu way; it requires a profound shift within all members of an organisation. Managers must learn to open themselves to the views and suggestions of subordinates and to work as members of a team. They must be prepared to give more than they take and to approach people and things from an emotional point of view rather than a strictly rational perspective. The strategy will have to be co-operative and not competitive and the focus on the group over the individual. “The concept of *ubuntu* can never be reduced to a methodology of doing something. It is a statement about being, about fundamental things that qualify a person to be a person” (Lessem & Nussbaum 1996: 70).

In such a value-sharing communal team, the individual emerges through the group. All individuals must be co-operative and dependent and work in the best interests of the group rather than for personal gain. Some Capetonians were asked what ubuntu means to them

(Jordaan et al. 1999: 12). Their views generally emphasised a sense of community and working together; an acceptance of difference and interdependence. For Capetonians, ubuntu is about “a spirit of community, of acceptance of our differences, and acceptance of the fact that we are all interdependent”. It also refers to “[t]ogetherness, sense of community - the involvement of everybody in the community learning to work with different people, accepting different ideas and overcoming the problems”.

Dave Bond (personal communication: May 1998) of the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, describes ubuntu as a traditional African ethos which is being used in business to address interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Case studies of businesses using this principle show features such as altered communication in the workplace, with a greater care taken over the language and style used; annual reports replaced by functions which are culturally diverse and acknowledge the work of staff in more appropriate ways (see Chapter Four). Bond and Human (personal communication: February 1999), are sceptical of some of these changes and suggest that the hierarchies have merely gone under cover. “[F]or all our talking about diversity, we are not getting any better at it. Our euphemisms are becoming more sophisticated; our pretensions more complex” (Human 1996: 6).

## CHAPTER FOUR: Towards Successful Intercultural Business

### 4.1 Introduction: Defining Success

The aim of this chapter is to pinpoint factors which are likely to lead a business to success in the South African environment. The discussion will necessarily include effective management of diversity in the workforce as our nation is one comprising a variety of cultures, races, ethnicities. In addition, factors such as financial growth, communication, flexibility and motivation will be discussed.

I realised when interviewing the Managing Director of Cape Town Construction, that defining success is no easy task. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) gives the following definitions:

1. the accomplishment of an aim; a favourable outcome
2. the attainment of wealth, fame or position
3. a thing or person that turns out well

These give an idea of what one is doing when one is trying to be successful: complete the task you have been set or have set yourself; make money or gain a reputation or position (of power); 'turn out well' or ensure that what you are doing turns out well. All these definitions can be said to apply to business and business people. However, they do not tell us what they have to do to make these things happen or what qualities a business will have if it has managed to do these things. What is a business that has turned out well? What does it look like? How do the people in it feel? I will attempt to answer these questions in this chapter.

I have not attempted to evaluate the success of Cape Town Construction in terms of annual profits or balance sheets. However, I believe that financial success will follow from interpersonal and management success. Nasser (1977) suggests that a concern for the people in an organisation and a climate of trust and open communication are likely to reduce labour turnover and increase performance. It is important to note that researchers

always influence their results with their own view of the world and their assumptions about the way things work. Nasser & Vivier (1995: 16) comment on this aspect of research, as well as pointing out the dominance of financial methods:

Gauging outstanding corporate performance often depends on the particular point of view of the researcher. Research by such eminent authorities as Hickman and Pascale shows that neither subjective nor objective test of company excellence provide a complete yardstick in themselves. South African business observers are more than familiar with the preponderance of financial ratios which are used to dissect corporate performance where, for example, financial performance is often regarded as the single most important factor in judging corporate success...

Nasser & Vivier (1995) combined the latest statistical methods<sup>1</sup> with subjective criteria in deciding which organisations in existence now are likely to be trend-setters in the future. They do not make it clear what kinds of subjective information were considered except to say that the stage in a company's life cycle was taken into account, i.e. whether it is new or established.

Webb of CTC (personal communication: February 1999) says, "My personal belief is that success is *balance*". Within the company his job as human resources director is to make everyone happy, the environment conducive to productive work and to keep people doing their jobs. If he achieves this, he considers himself successful in his work. He compares this to juggling: as circumstances change another ball needs to be thrown up and the process is continuous. He believes a company is considered successful in the market place if it delivers work on time and produces quality work; if the workforce is seen to be productive and efficient and there is no labour unrest. In addition, winning safety awards, for example, shows that the company cares for its people and as a result, the people

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Value-Added (EVA) and Market Value-Added (MVA) were devised by the economist Joel Stern and can be used to assess the annual (financial) performance of a company. EVA is an indication of the level of return earned over and above that expected by shareholders. MVA is the sum of all future EVAs, thus the two measures are related (Nasser & Vivier 1995; Booth 1997).

produce good work at the right time for a good price. This in turn ensures that the company has a good reputation and therefore enough work to keep its people securely employed. It is all a matter of balance: look after people without pampering them, so that they are happy enough to be productive, but not resting on their laurels and becoming complacent.

Changing times inevitably affect organisations. As their markets shift, people's attitudes and values alter and new approaches become necessary. Many scholars have suggested that economic modernisation and growth require social changes and new sets of attitudes and values within the community. Inkeles (cited in McClelland & Winter 1969: 9) identified certain attitudes as being likely to accompany modernisation. The following is a summary of the desired traits, drawn from cross-cultural study of employees in organisations:

a disposition to accept new ideas and try new methods; a readiness to express opinions; a time sense that makes men more interested in the present and future than in the past; a better sense of punctuality; a greater concern for planning, organization and efficiency; a tendency to see the world as calculable; a faith in science and technology; and, finally, a belief in distributive justice.

Judging from interviews at CTC, many of the qualities can be found among the employees. They are flexible and ready to accept change; they plan for the future and innovate new ways of procuring work to remain in business; they aim to deliver the best quality service as efficiently as possible. This chapter will look at the aspects of CTC that has made it successful. The subheadings for this chapter are based on a combination of the qualities mentioned above, items from Deming's (1982) list of the characteristics of a successful business and remarkable features of Cape Town Construction which I believe to have contributed to its success.

## 4.2 Flexibility and the Future

Bob Hindle (1998: 14) of the African Centre for Strategic Studies in Construction at the University of Cape Town discusses the challenges facing the construction industry in South Africa in a time of changing politics, business and intense competition. "Under such conditions, most managers develop a short-term mentality and an inward focus as they fight to gain competitive advantage. While in this survival mode, most cling to tradition and feel threatened by new ideas, to the point where other ideas are not even tolerated." He believes that this short-term approach works against unity and future business because customer satisfaction, industry development and long-term planning are neglected.

Deming (1982) and Nasser & Vivier (1995) also stress the importance of planning for the future and of bearing long-term goals and future customers in mind when making decisions today. Success in the quarterly report (figures on paper) does not guarantee longevity or success at any time in the future. Long-term sustainable growth and survival should be more important in making decisions in an organisation than quick-fix short-term solutions. The latter may seem more attractive and less cumbersome initially, but as time passes their validity is likely to expire and it will become clear that a more stable first-time solution would have been more valuable and effectively cheaper and easier. The South African mining industry attempted to institute safety programmes in English only as this was cheaper than providing training in several languages. Heugh (1992: 24), a member of the Pan South African Language Board, considers this approach foolish: "The quick fix solution incurs an irrecoverable outlay of expenditure: reduction of accidents is unlikely if the communication patterns have not been adequately addressed." What seemed to be the most cost-effective solution may well turn out to be a blatant waste of resources, whereas greater initial outlay and effort may have been justified within a short period.

Martin Marais, Managing Director of Cape Town Construction, feels that the world is dynamic and his company constantly changing. Any trade secrets that his competitors uncover are unlikely to be current or useful and will probably already have been replaced within the company. As a result the company does not have a great concern about

confidentiality, “perhaps less than we should” (Martin Marais, personal communication: November 1998)<sup>2</sup>. Much of what has been implemented at CTC is not easy to imitate, and Marais says, “if he [a competitor] can make it work, good luck to him”. All at CTC have worked very hard at opening themselves up to change. There is always resistance to change; there are always reasons for sticking to familiar ways of operating. They have tried to make themselves aware of the supreme effort required to change, and tackle the challenge of change energetically. It is clear from these remarks that CTC is aware of changing times and open to new ideas. This awareness and flexibility are strengths which, under current circumstances, put this company at an advantage over those companies which are frightened into rigidity and which are taking recourse to short-term crisis solutions which are unlikely to last and may in fact cost the company more than they save.

CTC has changed from doing things the traditional way, because Marais could not face and did not want to face conflict every day at work. He decided years ago to try to create an acceptable situation for every one. This involved communication among all members of the company openly and constantly, being prepared to listen and to act on what you hear. The greatest difficulty that the company faced in this regard, was the illiteracy of many of its employees. The only option they had (according to Marais) was to make their people literate at whatever cost. At first there was a great deal of uncertainty about the project. People were suspicious of the motives behind the literacy programme and resisted it. Many were ashamed or embarrassed because they had never learned to read or write and felt very exposed having to ‘go to school’ at 40 or 50 years of age. This was also reflected in my interviews where those who had attended literacy classes were hesitant to admit it and were often prompted by others. Nonetheless, the company persisted; pioneering an industrial education programme at a time when very little literacy training was being done in the country, and available programmes seldom went beyond the mechanics of literacy (Walton, Adult Basic Education Development Services, personal communication: March 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes ascribed to Martin Marais, MD of the company, are from an interview which took place on 11 November 1998.

### 4.3 Service

There is more to success than a willingness to accept change, but defining 'success' or 'a successful business' is difficult, Marais concedes. The situation in which you find yourself is inextricably bound up with the definition of success and the processes required to achieve it. In South Africa today there are pressures such as affirmative action, restrictions on overtime, economic uncertainty and a much thinner base of investors in property who are prepared to foot the bill for large buildings. Managing a construction company effectively is no easy task. An added complication is the tender system: contractors must submit the lowest possible tender in order to win the project. In order to cut their prices, they are forced to work with tilers, curtain makers, nail providers who may not be of the highest standard or may be unable to deliver the work on time. It is then the contractors who lose the R25 000 per day that the project is late. In this type of situation contractors have very little control but must bear all the responsibilities and liabilities.

As a result, CTC rely increasingly on negotiated work. They work very hard at maintaining the reputation they have built up over the years so that potential investors who plan to build, call them to do the job, bringing work to the company. A good reputation also brings repeat work to the company, saving them from always having to seek out new clients. In these cases the company hires an architect and quantity surveyor of its choice and works with them to produce the design, plans and price for a factory within a week. Once the proposal is accepted, CTC guarantees that the price will remain constant and that the work will be done on time. They can do this because they have done research on site, examined various materials and checked all plans for efficiency and practicability before submitting the proposal. Thus, they spend more money, time and effort up front, but later wastage is decreased (if not eliminated). Providing all the services clients need and saving them time and money, has won CTC work. This is the turnkey service mentioned in Chapter One.

In the UK a task force was asked to investigate the scope for improving efficiency and quality in the UK construction industry. Hindle (1998: 15) describes the findings of the

British Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions as “startling”. Findings in the task force’s report included that too many clients were dissatisfied with overall performance; that changes in process were required, which would eliminate waste and increase value for customers; that competitive tendering should be replaced with “long term relationships based on clear measurement of performance and sustained improvements in quality and efficiency” (cited in Hindle 1998: 15). The report also names one South African construction firm as an example of excellence: Cape Town Construction. They have gained a reputation for delivering what they promise, and what they promise is service excellence and customer satisfaction.

Deming’s (1982: 31- 32) 14 points for improving quality and productivity were mentioned in Chapter One. It will become evident in the course of this chapter that many of Deming’s points overlap with the strategy laid out for Cape Town Construction (Webber 1997: 126, cited in Chapter One). Among Deming’s points are two relating to service:

- (1) Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with a plan to become competitive and stay in business. This includes deciding whom top management is responsible to, e.g. share holders, customers, staff.
- (2) Adopt the new philosophy and culture which are in keeping with the new economic age. Delays, wastes, mistakes should not be accepted at a certain level; they should be investigated and eliminated.

These points suggest that service excellence and a concern for the customer have some importance. So what is success? “Being better,” says Marais. And that entails being known in the market and being known to be reliable and honest and being known to produce quality work on time. In addition, because of the unstable economy in this country, horizons are short: projects are decided on overnight and action must be taken rapidly. A company which can produce plans and then make them a reality quickly and efficiently at very short notice has the upper hand in this situation. CTC has taken a big step in taking on full responsibility for projects; they are “one stop liability” and they do

not make excuses - they would rather spend the same energy on getting the job done, says Marais.

CTC has thus found a way to survive in a cut-throat industry at a difficult time by giving all they can to clients. Traditionally success is maximising investors' return on their investment; Marais agrees that the shareholders and owners of CTC want to make money, but not at all costs. Besides, money is not the only measure of success. A pleasant environment in which all employees feel comfortable and motivated, good communication among members of the company and a sense of loyalty, trust and commitment are some others.

Success also involves constantly monitoring progress against targets and adapting strategies to stay competitive in changing times. In the past it was seen as a strength to stick to your principles, even disguising the realisation that you may have been wrong. Today this could be a (financially) dangerous stand to take as much can be lost through a lack of flexibility. Marais believes that strength is admitting when you are wrong and listening to other opinions and suggestions and being prepared to review your decision. The strength to change as it is required, is far more likely to lead you to success in South Africa's present climate (and in the world, for that matter). Change is the only constant, the experts say. Not even the definition of success is cut and dried; it too has to change with the times.

#### **4.4 Organisational Structure**

It seems to me that of the organisational structures discussed in Chapter Three, one would be the most successful in a multicultural South African environment. This structure would be flat rather than tall, as information flows more freely and more directly in flat structures. Messages need not be passed down from the top of the pyramid through various levels of middle management and supervisors before they reach their audience of wage earners; as a result there are fewer opportunities for distortion, and a greater likelihood of questions being asked to clarify and ensure understanding.

The classical and bureaucratic structures are therefore completely unsuitable as they require layers of employees arranged in a hierarchy, and rigid, formal processes, which ignore human problems and needs. Matrix organisations are less rigid, but more confusing, as workers have to report to two superiors and may have undefined roles or tasks. Good communication is possible within project groups, but seems unlikely company-wide.

The neo-classical structure has many virtues which aid communication of all kinds: it is less formal and power is less centralised, allowing people to speak directly to any other members of the organisation. Communication from managers down and employees up is encouraged and managers are expected to listen and respond. In addition, the social and personal needs of individuals are considered, making all workers feel respected and therefore relaxed, included, important.

According to the Webb, human resources director, the company has a fairly flat structure so that anyone is free to approach anyone else in the company with problems or queries and does not have to go via a line up or downwards. Although the structure is not strictly flat, it is a great deal less hierarchical than classical construction companies, with the power base spread among the Unity Forum, management, site supervisors and even general workers who get their say in Jika meetings. Some of the workers seemed aware of a hierarchy and see themselves as being on the bottom rung. They commented that the Managing Director seldom addresses them directly, but rather passes his remarks or criticisms to them via site managers or foremen. However, they did "add on that... it's only just depend... The middle management can also jump to the supervisor and go to the general worker and say 'No, this is stupid, what are you doing right now' you know it's not a line management, I cannot say it's a line management." In other words, although workers seem aware that some sort of hierarchy exists, they do not see it as a rigid structure which cannot be negotiated or circumvented. I noted that many Unity Forum members, regardless of their positions in the company, walk into Webb's office to ask questions, discuss problems, lodge complaints, and his door is always open.

#### 4.5 Quality Control Circles and Participation

A concept borrowed from the East has been of great value to managers around the world: Quality Control Circles (QC-Circles). These started in Japan, based on the natural Japanese way of working together and spread to America, where Henry Ford took up the idea in his 'green areas'. At CTC the concept is used in the guise of the *Jika* system, mentioned in Chapter One and discussed in greater detail below.

Deming (1982) is at least in part responsible for the spread of the concept of QC-Circles around the world, having discovered the concept in Japan and thought it worthy of propagation. He stresses that quality control cannot be installed as if it were a new computer or a more comfortable desk. It is a learning process that includes all members of staff, with top management leading the whole company; it can take years. Attempts to 'install' quality control and QC-Circles have failed on numerous occasions because the necessary learning had not taken place (Deming 1982; Webber 1997). The same has been said of the African ubuntu philosophy.

QC-Circles are a means of providing employees with the opportunity to take an active part in identifying and resolving problems in the workplace and creating an atmosphere that enables all employees to "achieve satisfaction by directing their ingenuity, imagination and creativity toward improving their work environment" (Koopman et al. 1987: 150). They place emphasis on the importance of workers. Managers should help satisfy the human needs of job satisfaction and self-fulfilment to encourage working towards the shared goals of the firm. Threats of retrenchment or firing should never have to be used. If the adversarial nature of the relationship between manager and worker can be eliminated and an atmosphere of trust created, the chances of everyone working together and reaching their goals will be much greater. "It is simple. You treat American workers as human beings with ordinary human needs and values. They react like human beings" (cited in Deming 1982: 86). This includes taking suggestions from the QC-Circles seriously and acting on them. If this does not happen, the groups are useless and can accomplish nothing.

Koopman et al. (1987: 148) believes that QC-Circles “may need to be further extended and personalised to address the challenges of South Africa today and in the future”.

The Jika system at CTC is a personalised South African adaptation of QC-Circles, and one which has definitely contributed to the high levels of motivation and productivity at the company. Jika meetings take place daily on site and allow for all employees to participate in and contribute to the running of the site. The Site Manager is not present at the meeting, the chair being a trained supervisor. This decision was made because it was thought that the Site Manager might inhibit the participative process and try to exert influence over others.

Meetings take place in the Jika hut (a converted shipping container). In addition to lockers, benches and Jika cards mentioned in Chapter One, the hut contains photographic displays showing the progress of the site and the work teams.

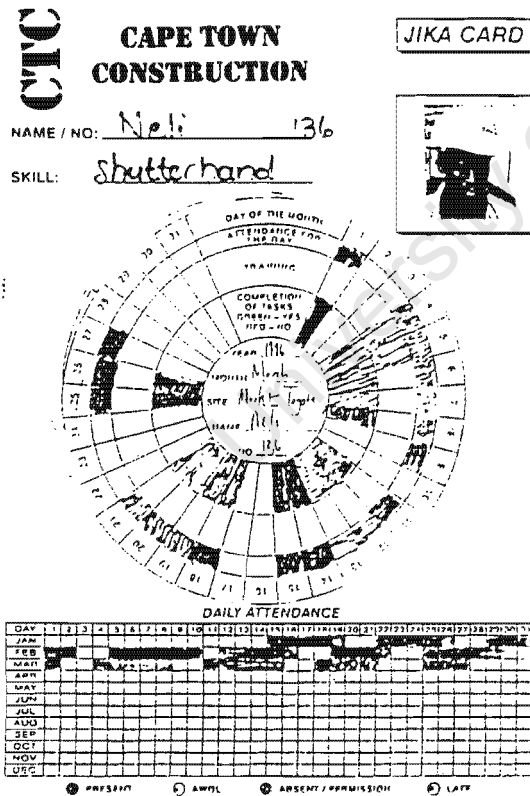


Fig. 4.1: Jika card (from Productivity Awards Entry 1996)

A plan of the site is coloured and posted in the hut, highlighting important features such as the concrete mixer, site office, first aid locations and so on. The productivity target is also indicated in various ways, such as coke bottles filled with sand, bar charts or graphs. This can also be compared with the actual output in similar formats (Productivity Awards Entry 1996).

Various issues raised at Jika meetings are carried over to Unity Forum meetings by the Unity Forum member from each site. These include wages, disciplinary matters, training needs, provident funds and bonus requests. A labour committee was formed for the first time in 1986 in discussion with the workforce. The committee was based on the old Industrial Relations system and consisted of four employees and the Managing Director who chaired meetings. These meetings did not achieve much, but seemed rather to be a symbolic gesture. In 1992, matters improved somewhat when the committee increased to 16 members representing the workforce. This change was an attempt to dilute the union influence which prevailed at the time and to improve communication among different parts of the company. In 1993 management took the committee away for a weekend and the present day Unity Forum was born. "This change of name was fundamental in laying the foundation for the change process where management showed their full commitment to uniting the entire company through the integration of cultural diversity and participation" (Webber 1997: 132).

A Unity Forum constitution was established, stipulating the prime function of the body: "to promote the interests of and to improve the efficiency of all employees at the place of work" (Webber 1997: 132). The Unity Forum now consists of 18 members, but the number does fluctuate occasionally in accordance with the size of the employee body and their needs. General workers, artisans, drivers, supervisors (all wage earners), as well as site managers and office staff are all represented. Fourteen seats are elected from wage earners, two seats from site management and two seats from office staff. Elections take place every two years and voting is by secret ballot.

Meetings take place once a month on company premises and are minuted by a secretary. Minutes are distributed to all employees in the company in both English and Xhosa. Management must consult the Unity Forum before taking certain steps, such as implementing disciplinary codes (see Webber 1997: 135 -136). Disputes within the Unity Forum are resolved by appointing a mediator from the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa (IMSSA). If mediation fails, an arbitrator from IMSSA will be appointed. The arbitrator's decision will be final and binding.

The Unity Forum has successfully negotiated a range of issues in the time it has existed. There has been a marked increase in loyalty and commitment to the company and trust has improved beyond expectations. The effects on participation and communication have been extremely positive. Webber (1997: 148) comments that it makes good business sense to get workers more involved in the business. "The controlling, autocratic management style was effective in the days of mass production. However, it is no longer effective in these competitive times when worker co-operation and input are vital success factors in continually striving to satisfy the needs of the client."

When, in an interview with Marais, I brought up the unions somewhat tentatively, I was emphatically assured that "We have no problems with the unions" (Marais, personal communication: November 1998). I had expected to hear something about the negative influence unions have in the workplace, as one hears throughout the world, but there are no problems with unions at CTC because there are no unions. Marais believes that CTC would be failing as a company if they could not create an "internal union" which would be better equipped than an external union (perhaps with its own agendas, political or otherwise) to address the problems and queries of members of the company. If management cannot listen to the union comprising their own workers, how would an external union be of any use to the workers? Management has decided to listen and to take seriously what it hears and act on it. In return, it gets increased productivity from workers because they feel important and included in company decisions; in turn they give their loyalty and commitment to the company. Webb supports this view, adding that one-on-

one direct communication with workers is likely to have better results: the broken telephone effect is eliminated. However, Marais concedes that Unity Forum members could learn from external unions to act more aggressively in the interests of the workers. Exposure to the outside world, the way things are done by other unions in South Africa and perhaps the world, can only be beneficial. Looking outwards and being open to new ideas and learning from others is one of CTC's greatest strengths.

“Organisations that have achieved excellence through successful participative systems have usually also been innovative in developing unique and personalised options toward institutionalising participation and communication in the workplace” (Koopman et al. 1987: 148). CTC has implemented a participative process which has brought the company success in difficult times.

#### **4.6 Education and Training**

Education is frequently a crucial factor in business success. However, education alone cannot guarantee success. The environment has to be conducive to learning, offering support to teachers and learners. Some environments are not healthy or strong enough to support education programmes, whereas CTC were committed to the *Fundani* ('we learn') programme, “whole heartedly” put their support behind it and stuck with it despite the bad years. And their motives were “upfront and pure” according to Wendy Walton of Adult Basic Education Development Services (ABEDS), the developers of the Fundani programme (personal communication: March 1999). In addition to a friendly environment, the company and teachers have to be committed to education for its own sake, not using it as a means of manipulation or control of workers.

CTC approached ABEDS, looking for a programme that was likely to work and that was not gimmicky as many others on the market seemed to be. Walton felt that this showed that they were committed to sound education and did not want a quick-fix solution which would be unlikely to last. CTC made the development of the Fundani programme possible

by giving ABEDS their support to try out new ideas. No adult basic education had been previously attempted in industry; earlier programmes had focused purely on the mechanics of reading and writing. Fundani aimed to take these skills further, making them relevant to the work environment and useful outside the classroom, and it was written specifically for adults. A small English oral component was added to motivate workers, as many saw literacy as a means to access English and felt demoralised when they realised what a long way there was to go. Fundani also includes a numeracy component. The programme is structured and ABEDS offers support to teachers, paying occasional visits to companies using their programme.

Deming (1982: 31) mentions education and training twice in his 14 points, supporting the suggestion that education can play an important role in a company's success if used honestly:

Institute a vigorous programme of education and (re)training. As jobs change with the changing economic and political climate, people may have to shift to different lines of work.

New courses aimed at helping people deal with changes in the workplace are constantly advertised in Cape Town newspapers. These include courses on computer skills, new legislation and coping in a changing environment<sup>3</sup>. Education programmes have to be carefully planned and designed with particular purposes in mind. However, these purposes should not be political, but educational. For example, ABEDS developed Fundani purely as an educational programme, bearing in mind the needs of the learners, not the company's aims to transform itself.

The literacy education programme is offered to all members of staff at the Adult Basic Education Centre at CTC. A team from ABEDS designed the programme and helped

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<sup>3</sup> For example, *Jobshop*, a supplement to *Cape Argus*, 17 March 1999, contained information on courses addressing the Employment Equity Act and how to implement it in the workplace. This is a good example of the kind of retraining that is constantly necessary as legislation, the economy and environment change. Several courses relating to computer programming, repair, literacy etc. were also advertised.

break down the resistance and fear that people felt. Walton believes that getting an external provider and teacher into the company to design and run the programme helped workers accept it, as it seemed less likely to be serving the company's aims. Since then the programme has been used in several other environments, including industry, non-government organisations and education departments.

The programme begins (for those who need it) with mother tongue literacy and breaks through to English for various purposes:

Fundani 1 } mother tongue literacy and numeracy

Fundani 2 } with small English oral components

Fundani 3 (breakthrough to English literacy)

Conversational English

Operational English

The company school offers education up to matric level. A teacher teaches any employee who wishes to further his/ her education from Std 8 to Std 10 level at the company's expense. Employees are permitted to spend one morning per week at the Cape Town Construction Training Centre attending tutorials. There is also a company library at the Training Centre with books donated by employees and purchased by the company.

Deming's (1982: 31) second point focuses on training. He draws attention here to printed matter that is particularly 'unintelligible' in the construction industry, a sector which attracts workers who have low levels of education and who are in many cases illiterate. Although the education programmes are addressing the problem of illiteracy, technical instructions on paper are unlikely to be a successful means of communicating within the company.

Institute modern methods of training on the job. Poor training of hourly workers, or none at all, and dependence on unintelligible printed instructions, seem to be a way of life. Sweeping changes are necessary.

Advanced technical training is provided for employees of CTC in particular fields. The company is in regular contact with the Building Industries Federation of South Africa (BIFSA)<sup>4</sup> and other training institutions and offers a range of courses in additional skills to employees who show an interest or particular potential.

6M training was initiated during the company's transformation. One of its aims was to help employees understand the business world better; another was to make them part of the transformation process. The six M's are Management, Men, Machinery, Materials, Market and Money, as mentioned on page 12.

One of the most difficult matters relating to the literacy classes, was when to hold them. Finding a venue was easy, but finding times for people to attend was much less so. After many trials and tests, it was agreed that 7 am was the best starting time. Students were fresh and sharp and learnt well and only one hour of work time was sacrificed. The company provided transport to a central venue at their offices and gave a work hour from 8 am to 9 am. Workers gave an hour of their own time from 7 am to 8 am. Two hours was as long as anyone could be expected to concentrate. The education programme impacts on the company's success for two main reasons: (1) Workers see the programme as a commitment to their future and thus feel motivated to give something in return; and (2) it improves communication among members of staff. (Marais & Webb, personal communication). The workers supported these claims, thanking the company for the access they were given to education and for the skills they learned. Several comments were also made about the impact of the education programmes on communication. Workers felt that they could communicate better with supervisors, outsiders to the company and that they could fill out forms at institutions such as banks where they had previously needed a great deal more assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> BIFSA administers the tender process, quality of building and codes of good practice and controls education and training in the industry.

## 4.7 Management

A particular kind of manager is needed to successfully manage a intercultural work force. Jackson (1993: 168) suggests that a manager in an intercultural and changing environment:

- needs to be adaptive through a capability to learn
- needs to manage own career in the international arena
- needs to be able to manage cross-cultural differences
- needs to be able to negotiate across cultures
- needs to be able to manage uncertainty through decision making
- needs to be able to manage change
- needs to be able to manage international projects

Tsurumi (cited in Deming 1982:84) adds that managers need to realise that management requires active participation, negotiation and decision making. Managers cannot expect to sit in their offices while the business runs itself and workers do all the work. His article is entitled "American management has missed the point. The point is management itself"!

Deming (1982: 31) also stresses the idea of active management:

Find problems. Management should not be content to wait for problems to seek them out. This is only likely to happen once they have reached a critical level. It is part of the role of management to ensure that systems are constantly improved.

Deming (1982) further suggests that modern methods of supervision of production workers are instituted. He asserts that the responsibility of foremen should change from sheer numbers to quality, i.e. instead of judging a day's work on how many units were completed, it should be judged on how good the completed units are and how few mistakes were made which had to be corrected. It is also important that foremen have the requisite power and authority to carry out their duties. Management in turn must be prepared to take immediate action on reports from foremen concerning defective tools and machinery, fuzzy operational definitions etc. (Deming 1982: 17&32). It is my impression that managers at CTC are willing to listen to problems and actively look for solutions.

Jackson (1993: 215) provides a list of qualities which he recommends using for the selection of international managers. The criteria seem suitable to be applied to any intercultural manager. Aside from qualifications and management skills, he mentions the following:

- **cultural empathy** - sensitivity and non-judgement
- **adaptability and flexibility** - integrate with others, manage change and different frameworks
- **diplomatic skills** - negotiate, deal with people
- **language aptitude** - learning languages quickly could be useful

These skills are essential in dealing with a workforce from a vastly different cultural and linguistic background to one's own. At CTC there appears to be a great deal of cultural understanding and tolerance, and many of the employees have learned some of each other's language. This includes the human resources director who speaks all three of the company's major languages: Xhosa, English and Afrikaans. Two other white members of the organisation are reported by Webb to speak fairly fluent Xhosa.

Cultural empathy and showing a willingness to listen and act on what others have to say creates an atmosphere of trust which is very important at CTC. Establishing a high level of trust and maintaining it through interactive participation was one of the aims of the transformation process (Webber 1997: 126). Fielding (1993: 53) suggests that companies "[s]trive to create an atmosphere of trust in which different approaches are respected." Deming (1982: 32) supports this view: "Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company." People are often afraid to ask questions, or to ask for clarification more than once. In too many cases they persist in ignorance or uncertainty, not having the courage to raise their queries or address their problems. A particular danger arises in the area of safety when the quota system is used, as foremen may continue to use a machine they know to be faulty, rather than halt production to report it and risk not

making their daily quota. The results can be economically damaging, for example if the machine breaks and is then out of action for several days while being repaired.

Affirmative action is one of the most difficult issues facing management in South Africa at present and it needs very active, diplomatic and flexible managing. In terms of the ANC draft Bill of Rights, affirmative action includes all anti-discriminatory and anti-poverty measures. At CTC, “[m]anagement believes that affirmative action in employment is the creation of equal employment opportunities without lowering standards and without necessarily limiting the career aspirations or expectations of current employees who are competent in their jobs” (Productivity Awards Entry 1996: 15). The company feels that employment equity takes full advantage of all talent available and considers a broader pool of skilled people. This in turn can lead to greater stability, productivity, motivation and commitment among members of the company. CTC has been firmly committed to equitable and efficient systems since 1990 when adult education and training programmes were started (ibid.: 16). In 1999, six new apprentice carpenters entered training and they are all female. This is another step towards employment equity. In addition to a personal interview, the Predictive Index<sup>5</sup>, a personality profile instrument, was used to determine the behavioural patterns of the applicants so that they could be matched to the job profile.

The pressures of managing fairly and effectively in the changing South African environment, make the job of a manager very complex. A variety of skills are essential for dealing with day to day problems ranging from cultural clashes to administrative problems. Lessem’s (1989) developmental manager would perhaps do well in such a situation. The developmental manager with interpersonal skills and a concern for relationships, earns respect from others in the company by treating them as equals and showing them respect. Every worker is encouraged to take on whole tasks and carry them to completion, thus

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<sup>5</sup> Predictive Index satisfies the requirements laid out in the Employment Equity Act which states that “Psychological tests and other similar assessments of an employee are prohibited unless the test of assessment being used:

- has been scientifically shown to be valid and reliable
- can be applied fairly to all employees
- is not biased against any employee or groups”.

gaining the satisfaction of producing something from start to finish, or of playing an important part in the well-being of the company. These managers acknowledge that people are social beings even at work and give everyone the chance to develop, also constantly working on their own development.

#### **4.8 The Ubuntu Philosophy**

Webb (personal communication: May 1998) believes that the ubuntu philosophy can and should be used to improve industrial relations. Instead of treating workers as slaves, in the old South African tradition, each person should be respected and treated as an important contributor to the success of the organisation: "A person is a person through other people." Symbols of respect and recognition can go a long way towards motivating workers. A symbolic gesture which means a great deal to workers at CTC, is the managing director addressing workers from his position on a toolbox in the workshop. His presence there seems to speak far more than his words. Workers commented that "I can say that it's really nice" and that they felt his coming to the workshop showed respect for them. They also pointed out that many workers who are employed on site would never know what their employer looked like if it were not for such encounters:

Ja, I think so ( ) if you work for somebody you must see him or you must see her, you mustn't hide for you are working under him. I think it's very nice to be see him talking in front of us ( ). Anyway sometimes he can come here at the site he can come and stand in front of you didn't know what is this guy, just close up his mouth and stand, you can sit down the whole time about 20 minutes sitting doing nothing, but I don't know that he is the guy I'm working for.

Several authors have documented the use of the ubuntu philosophy in managing change and diversity in South Africa. All reports are very positive, claiming that ubuntu "will facilitate the healing process in repairing polarised performance relationships... will help to create a culture of racial, political and cultural tolerance based on unconditional respect, acceptance and human dignity... will bring the black African heritage into the workplace

which will help to integrate black employees” (Mbigi 1997: 5). Christie (1996: 78) tells tales of his own development and experiences in organisations and provides examples of what an African approach to management can achieve: “a partnership between management and employees has been created ... which acknowledges that co-operation is foremost when it comes to the sustainability of business”. He describes how another company became aware of the importance of the extended family in African culture and acknowledged it in their management by trying to employ family members of employees, provided they had a minimum qualification and could do the job. In addition, school fees of all children of employees were paid (at government rates), regardless of the number of children. One of the workers voiced his satisfaction with the company, by saying he felt at home there: “Like in our villages, there is a togetherness at Hudaco. ... I feel like I’m part of the family. We are all fully in the picture, and we know everything that is happening here” (in Christie 1996: 81).

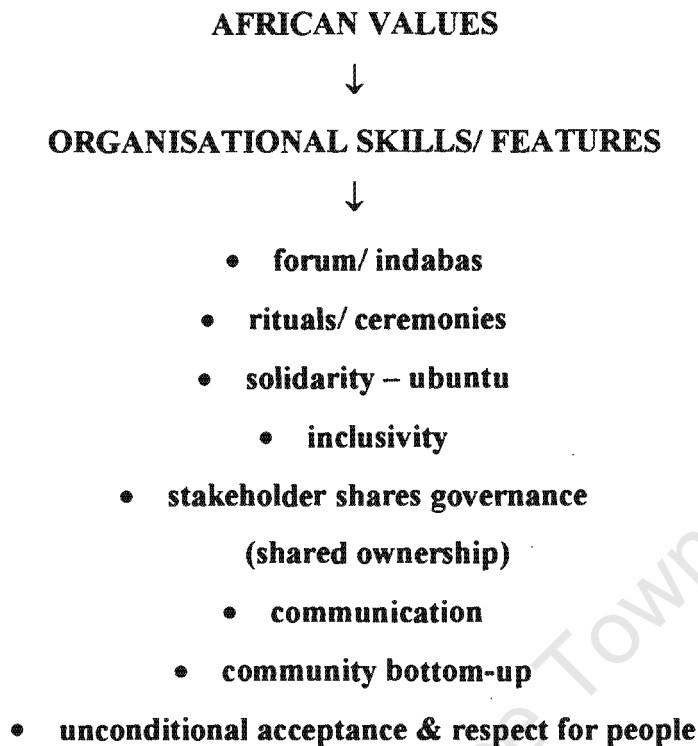
Mbigi (1995) describes his experience of turning around a tea estate by integrating his tribal education with his management training; by listening to people’s dreams; by arranging *pungwes*, all night renewal ceremonies based on traditional Shona tribal celebrations, and encouraging everyone to participate and share in creating a new corporate vision; by developing a village spirit in the organisation and teaching people to work together to survive as a community. Lessem & Nussbaum (1996) also present case studies where organisations have been saved from ruin by applying African philosophies and practices. Europak serves as a good example: they consciously developed human resource policies which would facilitate the development of human potential; they introduced management principles that were referred to as “indigenous African management”; they chose a manager who would provide “affirmation, encouragement and support” and who allowed workers to experiment. Workers felt a sense of increased dignity and self-esteem and became more motivated and productive (Lessem & Nussbaum 1996: 91).

Mokoatle (1977), in an article entitled *The Place of Black Labour in Manpower Policies*, expresses the belief that if the South African economy is to mature, organisations will have to incorporate Black labour at higher levels and in planning. He adds that the Black workers of today are striving for autonomy, independence, success and recognition in the workplace. In addition, they want to share in setting goals and standards and they want participative communication. Mokoatle also mentions a desire for education and training, opening more interesting jobs and making workers more effective. Employees at CTC voiced their satisfaction with the company's policy to provide training for them:

Yes we feel happy in this company because here we are... When they admit us we was general workers many of us know nothing about any skill; so now most of workers they have the skills they post us to the training schools like BIFSA so now we get to know, what must I do in this company, because you know your work. Because when you don't know your work, they ask you what are you want to do here inside the company then you choose no, I want to do like that thing; so they post you to know that thing and pass and get certificate for it.

Another worker added that this type of training would enable them to get work elsewhere if they had to leave. He was pleased to inform me that the company trained its own workers when it needed carpenters for example, instead of bringing trained carpenters from outside. Learning new skills also means that workers are not stuck in one position throughout their careers: "that time you did get the job here you was only general worker, you know only spade and pick you know ( ) but now you.. in future... some time you are bricklayer sometime you are carpenter ( ) that is very important and I like that.

Mokoatle (1977) challenges organisations to tackle the needs of workers and become more productive and competitive in the future. His view is reiterated by Mbigi (1995): "South Africa's economic transformation will start with the development and empowerment of its people, as well as their collective efforts towards continuous improvement and wealth creation" and also supported by Christie (1996: 11) who describes African management as being "where people are at the centre of things."



**Fig. 4.2: African values for organisations (adapted from Mbigi 1997: 14)**

The above shows which African values can be used in organisations to create an organisational structure and culture which will include and respect all workers. “If we are going to build a competitive developed nation, competitive institutions as well as organisations, the unmistakable **collective solidarity** in African life should find its expression in our modern forms of **business entrepreneurship, business organisations and management**” (Mbigi 1997: 3).

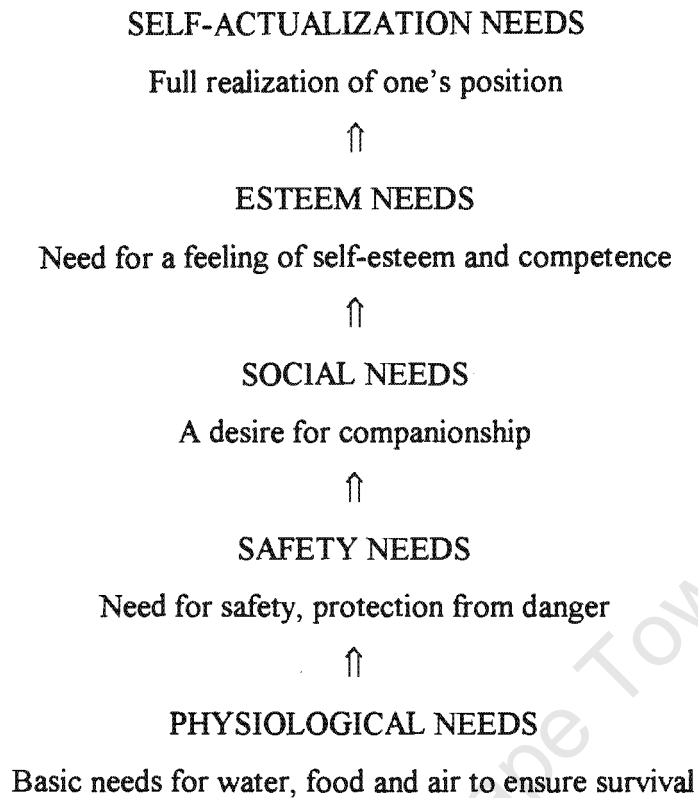
It seems to be an unproblematic notion in South African business that ubuntu is ‘the African way’ and that in Africa it should be acknowledged and used to help create a successful and happy organisation. However, Human (1996: 23) is sceptical about the sudden change in white managers’ attitude from seeing ‘black’ culture as a hindrance to success, to deciding that “certain ‘African’ values are crucial to the long term success of the capitalist enterprise”. Human sees this change as a move from one maximalist extreme

to another. Simply put, the maximalist approach to culture argues that a person's culture will tend to determine the way in which that person interacts with others. This approach is exemplified by Hofstede (cited in Human 1996: 21) who defines culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group of people from another". Human points out that the mention of 'diversity' brings to mind various kinds of difference, generally between nations, ethnicities, races. However, this thinking overlooks the existence of differences within cultures, believing certain values to be typical of a particular culture with negligible variation among members of that culture. In other words this view emphasises intergroup difference over intragroup difference. This is particularly evident in Africa where phrases such as 'African Management' and 'Ubuntu: The African Dream' abound, suggesting that there is one African way which is the same for all Africans. This may be a grossly simplified Western view which defines all difference with reference to itself: African cultures are all different from ours, therefore they must all be the same.

#### **4.9 Motivation**

Many theorists have hypothesised about what motivates workers and how to achieve the right conditions to keep workers happy and performing at their best. This section will examine some of the theories of motivational factors and conditions which have been proposed as motivation is an important requirement for success.

Among the most famous of scholars who have theorised about what motivates human beings, is Maslow (1954), one of the behavioural psychologists who first investigated psychological issues in the workplace. He believed that people have needs which form a hierarchy and they only seek to satisfy a particular need once all basic needs below it on the hierarchy have been fulfilled. Once a need is satisfied, it no longer motivates and new reasons to keep working must be found.



**Fig. 4.3: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (from Fielding 1993: 38)**

The safety needs are interesting for this study, because they have to do with a need for a stable, predictable, lawful, orderly world. Most adults' safety needs should be satisfied in ordinary life by insurance of various kinds, job security, a savings account and so on. These are the things which bring order and organisation to an uncertain world. CTC uses similar kinds of 'insurance' to motivate workers.

Esteem needs include the need for self-esteem and the need for the respect and recognition of others. The self-esteem need includes a desire for strength, achievement, competence, confidence, independence and freedom, whereas other-esteem includes a desire for a reputation, prestige, status, attention and importance. It is debatable to what extent these are universal and how far they are determined by Maslow's own culture. The philosophy

of ubuntu discussed later in this chapter suggests that a desire for independence or prestige is not inherent in all human beings.

Other theorists have variously suggested that people are motivated by work ethic, by a lust for power or concern for others, or by the desire to compete or win. Work conditions and work content have been played off against each other as motivational factors (see Maccoby 1976; Vroom 1964).

Herzberg proposed a two-factor theory (1959/ 1993) of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the workplace, based on psychological research. Satisfiers are intrinsic to the job and lead to worker satisfaction. Dissatisfiers are job extrinsic factors which do not lead to satisfaction, but can impact negatively on productivity when they are not adequate.

Satisfiers are largely associated with growth-oriented needs and tend to boost performance and satisfaction when present. These include achievement or quality performance, recognition, responsibility, advancement and growth. These are known as **motivators** as they are responsible for increased performance, positive attitudes and fulfilling the need for self-actualization (Herzberg et al. 1993: 114):

Man tends to actualize himself in every area of his life, and his job is one of the most important areas. The conditions that surround the doing of the job cannot give him this basic satisfaction; they do not have this potentiality. It is only from the performance of a task that the individual can get the rewards that will reinforce his aspirations.

Dissatisfiers are environmental factors which do not boost performance or satisfaction, but are the major sources of job dissatisfaction when absent or inadequate. These include pay, job security, working conditions, flexitime, interpersonal relations and company policy and administrative practices. These are known as **hygiene** factors as they serve to prevent problems and remove health hazards from the environment, i.e. cleanse the environment.

Some cross-cultural research has been done to test the validity of the two-factor theory in different parts of the world. In most cases the results confirmed those of the original study: workers are satisfied by job intrinsic motivators and dissatisfaction is caused by job extrinsic hygiene factors. However, a study done in South Africa suggests that unskilled black workers derive satisfaction from hygiene factors (Backer 1982). This contrasted with the 'normal' pattern of skilled black workers in South Africa. Perhaps these workers are still aiming to satisfy their basic physiological and safety needs and have become in Herzberg's (1993: xvii) words "addicted to hygiene".

McClelland (1976) argues that there need not necessarily be a universal set of needs as Maslow suggests, especially after the most basic needs are fulfilled. McClelland therefore proposed a system of needs which can be seen as being culturally specific. The three needs suggest why people in organisations behave as they do: because of a need for achievement, a need for affiliation or close interpersonal relationships, and a need for power. These needs motivate different people to varying degrees. The need for achievement is believed to be the most effective motivator for a business environment. McClelland (1976: A<sup>6</sup>) stresses that the term refers to "the desire to do something better, faster, more efficiently, with less effort". It does not mean a general desire to succeed, nor does it apply to a doing well at all sorts of enterprises. People with high need for power wish to control and influence others and work towards gaining positions of authority. For them satisfaction comes from status, winning and effectively controlling others. Those high in a need for affiliation are interested in establishing and maintaining good interpersonal relations and a friendly atmosphere. They value working together and need the support and friendship of others. Satisfaction is derived from having friends and being liked and accepted by the group. Conflict is frustrating and causes unhappiness.

Tower et al. (1997) conducted a study in Britain and Russia comparing the extent to which the cultures of these countries emphasised co-operation and competition. They cite studies which have shown that individualists (idiocentrics) and collectivists (allocentrics)

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<sup>6</sup> Pages in the new introduction to the 1976 edition are marked alphabetically.

have different psychological needs. Idiocentrics value achievement, competition, pleasure and social recognition; whereas allocentrics need co-operation, equality, honesty and affiliation to feel good. These results from social psychological research seem to support the claims of management gurus in South Africa that 'African' people operate according to different values from 'Westerners' and are motivated by affiliation more than by achievement (Christie 1996, Lessem 1989, Lessem & Nussbaum 1996, Mbigi 1995 & 1997).

Deming (1982) argues for quality itself as a motivator: He believes that quality improves productivity. The reason for this is that a quality product requires no reworking, so no person hours and no machine hours are wasted and the cost of production is reduced. This makes the customer happy and improves the morale of the staff. Job satisfaction is increased as more can get done and less repetition is necessary. Workers are also less likely to be reprimanded or disciplined and will require less supervision. This sense of autonomy and the quality of their work, can improve workers' motivation.

The Psychologist, journal of the British Psychological Society, dedicates an issue to emotion at work. Articles in this issue discuss shame in the workplace, emotion management, the effect of affect on strategic decision making. It is interesting to note that very little research has been done in the area of emotion at work, perhaps because work is an environment where one is expected to be 'business-like' and 'professional' and there is no room for emotion in these terms. Also, research has explored job satisfaction and stress and these seemed the only, or most relevant emotions at work. However, various articles in The Psychologist (1999, 12 (1)) show that emotions are an important part of our lives which impact on our performance and cannot be ignored in a work environment.

Cape Town Construction believes job security to be an incentive which will motivate workers (see Chapter One). This links up with Herzberg's (1959) hygiene factors and Maslow's (1954) safety needs. Perhaps these workers exemplify those who are "addicted to hygiene" and do not aspire to satisfy higher order needs. However, Deming's quality as

motivator also seems to be relevant at CTC as quality has been a major goal for some years and workers seem eager to produce excellent quality work and not only to save on rework, but also to benefit from the positive feedback. The company are also using esteem needs (Maslow 1954) and achievement needs (McClelland 1976) as motivating factors by employing a peer pressure system (the Jika system discussed in Chapters One and Three) and making an upward career path available to all workers.

As suggested earlier in this section, prestige and power may not necessarily motivate all people. McClelland's theory supports this view by positing different motivating needs which may be characteristic of different groups. The concept of ubuntu seems to echo many of the values of a manager with a high need for affiliation. If black people in South Africa identify with ubuntu as a way of life, they are far more likely to be motivated by social needs and co-operation than by a desire for power or recognition, or even efficiency.

#### **4. 10 Communication**

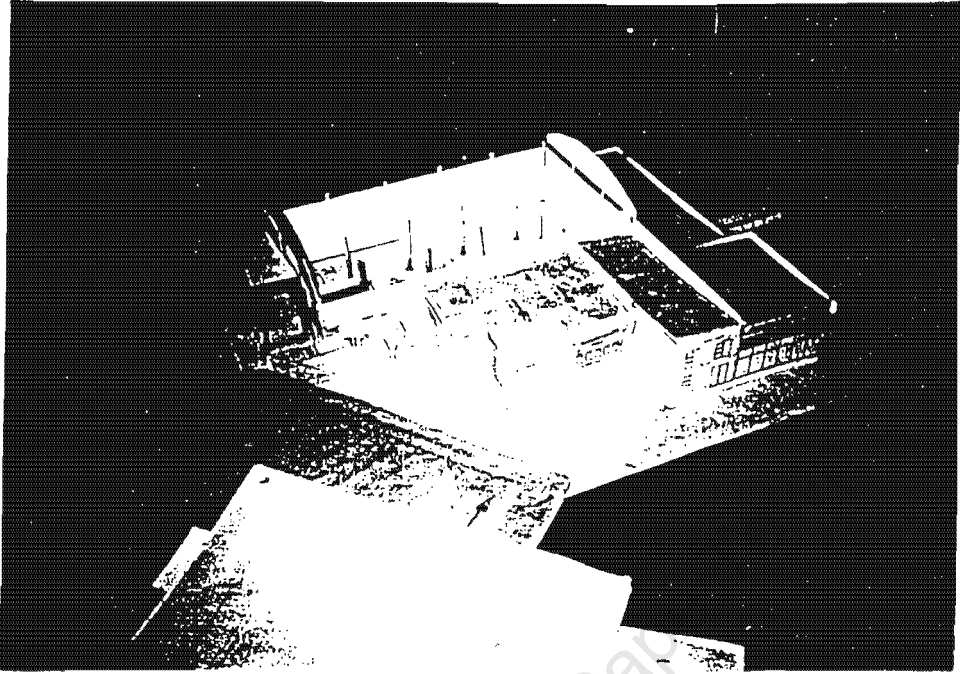
Communication is a major theme in defining successful management. This has special relevance in culturally diverse environments where communication has to be effective and appropriate to a variety of different groups, each with its own beliefs, values and attitudes. Good intercultural communication is essential in South Africa where members of several cultures now find themselves working together. Jackson (1993: 8) begins the first chapter of his book entitled Oganizational Behaviour in International Management as follows: "We start with the premiss that communication is at the heart of successful management." Webb, the human resources director at CTC, is of the opinion that communication is the biggest problem organisations have (personal communication: May 1998). He points out that human resources language differs from managing director language and financial language, which again are very different from the language spoken by the majority of workers. Levels of education and positions within the company influence the way people speak and behave, particularly in the presence of subordinates and superiors. In many South African businesses this is further complicated by a multicultural workforce which

speaks a number of languages and dialects and belong to a range of cultures (Webb personal communication: May 1998).

Webb (ibid.) believes that the best way to reach a workforce such as the one at CTC which is semi-literate and representative of several languages, is to use visual means. Visuals on large posters are most effective, as captions would have to be in three languages and even then those who cannot read would not have access to the words. Visuals therefore have to be clear, detailed and as culturally appropriate as possible. For example, this company uses images such as oxen pulling ploughs and cows being milked: things which work for you should be taken care of, not worn out by rough treatment. The message can be carried over to machinery: in order to get the most out of it and make it last, you should use it carefully and always keep it clean etc. Workers gave positive feedback about visual communication such as posters: "If he look there he say no it's all right, because it's dangerous other one, other one is not dangerous, so that's why we like that ... ( ) it's a good". This comment referred to a poster which was split in two, showing the incorrect handling of a machine on one side, and the correct way on the other. The man in the first half had got injured; he is depicted with his hair standing on end and a grimace. The other picture shows a man in the correct safety gear working the machine correctly and safely and smiling.

Visual communication is taken even further by having models of each new building constructed before work begins on the site. Workers are then able to see very clearly what they are working on and what it should look like on completion. In addition, when digging a hole, it is no longer just a hole: It becomes the place for a column to be planted which will hold up the roof. This is a far more inspiring task and its purpose is clear. Workers are not instructed to perform mindless tasks without explanation; the importance of holes, for example, is made clear. It is easy to see how this communication of purpose would motivate workers. Webber (1997: 130) notes the necessity for such forms of visual communication: "Due to the fact that the construction industry attracts the unskilled, uneducated and illiterate population by the very nature of its work, the communication

process needs added dimensions other than that would be sufficient in a developed Westernized first world country or for that matter an industry which attracts more educated employees.”



**Fig.4.4: Model of building (from Productivity Awards Entry 1996)**

Jackson (1993: 235) makes a very important point: “In cross-cultural encounters, you speak with an individual, not a company or a nation!” He is one of very few authors I encountered who acknowledges individual character in addition to national and corporate culture. He stresses the importance of relating to every person as a unique individual with their own personality and peculiarities. This applies to any kind of communication, but is frequently overlooked in cross-cultural encounters and discussions of these because attention is invariably focused on the defining characteristics of the ‘other group’. This has some value as it gives those who are unused to different cultures a sense of security, something on which to base their interactions with strangers. However, the danger is that they will forget to show basic respect and to listen and learn from different groups and about them. Barriers to intercultural understanding are common enough without interlocutors entering interactions with blinkers and prejudices in place (see Jackson 1993: 224ff.). Webb (personal communication: November 1998) believes that culturally-bound

differences in communicative behaviour must not be ignored or underestimated, but are so often over-emphasised that similarities are overlooked. People are people and mutual respect is of utmost importance. He goes on to say, "Sympathy and empathy with the addressee's unique cultural pattern should always be a priority. Such an approach, however, requires considerable concentration, patience and understanding from both parties" (ibid.).

Human, who specialises in diversity management and employment equity, echoes Jackson's emphasis on the importance of the individual (personal communication: January 1999). She notes how black people are referred to as 'affirmative action candidates' or 'affirmatives'. Both of these terms carry a great deal of baggage, suggesting that these people are inferior, incompetent, in need of training, perhaps even to be pitied. They are not seen as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses. "The stereotype is still there, couched in modern euphemisms, but still there nonetheless" (Human 1996: 3).

White managers have learned a new vocabulary but have not really had a change of heart. Many of them have been to workshops where they have been taught how to deal with blacks, taught to be aware of cultural differences and to respect these, taught African solutions to managing diversity. However, these workshops invariably fall into the trap of reinforcing differences between 'us' and 'them' and providing a stereotype of members of the other culture. Trainers place no emphasis on the "myriad of other sociological and psychological variables which impact social interaction" (ibid.).

Giddens (1989: 39) cites a description of American cleanliness rituals which makes even brushing teeth sound bizarre and slightly frightening:

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about the care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

This description aims to illustrate that any cultural practices can seem extremely strange if they are not seen as part of a system of values, beliefs and behaviours. Giddens cites this strange tale to alert his readers to the danger of ethnocentrism, of judging others by their own cultural standards. Even our own most 'natural' behaviour can seem abnormal if considered from an outsider's point of view.

Human (1996) criticises two polar approaches to culture, maximalism and minimalism. She feels that at either end of the continuum, certain factors are being ignored.

Maximalism or the universalism approach to culture argues that a person's culture will tend to determine how that person interacts with others. By contrast the minimalist or particularist view believes differences within cultures to be so great that generalisations of cultural norms are seen as ridiculous. This view takes an interactional approach to culture, arguing that culture constitutes a subconscious part of a person's identity as communicator and it is therefore constructed largely by the perception of the other participant in the interaction. Human suggests that these views are the opposite extremes on a continuum and wishes to find a more comfortable and moderate position.

Her position rests on the context of interactions. She compares culture to a kaleidoscope (1996: 46): At different times different colours are dominant, as various aspects of one's culture are more important or relevant depending on the context. For example, when supporting a national team at the Olympic Games or on a national holiday, the patriotic national culture may dominate, relegating all other aspects such as occupation, religion and family to the background. During a weekend at home playing sport and spending time with the family, national culture becomes irrelevant and the focus is on personal interests. Each aspect of culture can be seen as a colour in the kaleidoscope which changes in prominence at various times. Individual social identity is very complex as it is made up of dynamic identities which rely on culture, personality, interests, nationality, religion and so on. "What we would appear to need is the ability to differentiate between the various individual identities and to integrate on the basis of the information relevant to a particular context" (Human 1996: 47). For example, if employers hold a stereotypical view of

women as emotional, irrational, inefficient and therefore unable to hold down an important management position, they are unlikely even to consider women for such a position. However, if employers looked at the competencies required for a job and assessed all applicants in terms of criteria relevant to the job and the context of the job, it may turn out that a particular woman is the best person for the position. CTC used a similar approach when appointing female apprentice carpenters in early 1999.

Fielding (1993: 53) makes some suggestions as to how companies can ensure that cultural values and approaches to communication are respected. He proposes that companies encourage open discussion of differing cultural values and the different ways in which cultures view situations and communication. This can lead to an atmosphere of tolerance and non-discrimination. If combined with sensitivity to non-verbal cues and a willingness to ask questions and clear up misunderstandings, this should result in excellent communication and intercultural understanding.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: The Unity Forum**

### **5.1 Introduction**

When I arrived at the offices of Cape Town Construction for a Unity Forum meeting, I noticed people arriving at work, greeting each other by name, asking after one another's health, smiling warmly at me. No one seemed to use titles or surnames and each person who arrived went to their office and left the door open. One woman sat at her computer whistling! The atmosphere was remarkably warm, happy and relaxed.

The Unity Forum seemed to continue the trend of casual friendliness I had encountered in the front office. All the members were sitting around tables arranged in a U-shape, with the chairperson facing them. I was introduced, officially welcomed to the meeting and greeted warmly by all present. Meetings take place in a classroom in a building between the offices and the yard and workshop. The classroom is normally used for literacy and other classes and is equipped with a white board and bookshelves.

The members of the Unity Forum, as mentioned in Chapter One, represent a cross-section of the company. The tea lady, a management representative and bricklayers, site managers, supervisors, literacy training officers, human resources staff, carpenters, drivers and buyers are all present. The eighteen members are elected by the whole company to fill the following positions stipulated in the constitution: 14 wage earners, 2 site managers and 2 office staff.

Before the meetings, there may be some casual chatting and joking, but as more members arrive, this subsides as the meeting frame is invoked by the chair welcoming the members to the meeting. The tone is set and a certain seriousness descends on the group. However, the meetings are not highly formal and there is still a fair amount of laughter and friendliness. The Unity Forum exists to make decisions concerning the workforce: it is a labour committee. The committee aims for consensus on all matters and will continue a

debate until it reaches its natural conclusion. On occasion the chair intervenes to prevent unnecessary repetition and to propel the group towards reaching a decision.

A few people were absent at each of the meetings I attended, but of those present, there was one black woman, one white man and four or five coloured men and the rest were black men. Most members of the Unity Forum are aged between 20 and 35, with some of the long-term employees and the tea lady somewhat older. Xhosa was the first language of all the black members present, the coloured men spoke Afrikaans as first language, and the white man spoke English. Everyone had some English as an additional language, but proficiency varied. Most of the coloured Afrikaans-speakers could speak and understand some Xhosa. Many of the Xhosa-speakers understood some Afrikaans, but used it only for limited functions. The only white member speaks fairly fluent Afrikaans and Xhosa, although he code-mixes Xhosa and English liberally. Code-mixing of this kind is also common among Xhosa-speakers: “Like for instance if I’m talking Xhosa I use to mix like putting in *but* whereas I’m speaking Xhosa or *maar* whereas I’m speaking Xhosa.” The Chair opened the meeting in English, thus making this language the unmarked choice for the meeting. As Fairclough (1989) points out, powerful participants in discourse are able to determine the discourse type and its conventions. English seems to be perceived as the language most appropriate to meetings, perhaps because it serves as a *lingua franca* to which every one has some access; perhaps because it is associated with formal situations and serious matters.

## 5.2 Language Choice

Afrikaans seems to fulfil an emotive function in and outside meetings. This observation is supported by Mesthrie (in press) in a paper regarding the English of male workers in the Western Cape: the expressive function of language is often fulfilled by code-switching to Afrikaans. Such switches are speaker-motivated and are most often used for emphatic statements and jokes. Members of all the ethnic groups seem to make use of Afrikaans to defuse tension and relax the meeting. Afrikaans is seen as a language which is not used in

meetings and as such can be used to contrast with English, and Xhosa to some extent. A dialect which is stigmatised among middle-class Capetonians is used among coloured workers to invoke a shared identity, and group membership is affirmed by casual chatter in Afrikaans. The emotive use of Afrikaans which spans all three language groups was illustrated when claims made under the Workmen's Compensation Act were raised and it was stressed that site managers must fill claim forms out correctly so that the claims can be processed. Xolani commented: "If the site manager doesn't do his job properly what about.. *die arme man wat seergekry het* ('the poor man who got hurt')?" This comment is very interesting coming from a Xhosa-speaker, particularly one who speaks good English and makes all his contributions to meetings in English. It seems that he is using Afrikaans to add emphasis to his statement and to express sympathy for the unfortunate worker who may not receive a payout because of a site manager's carelessness. The comment also had a humorous effect and brought smiles to many faces, probably because Afrikaans is not considered a serious meeting language and reduces the gravity of both formal discussions and distressing topics such as this one. Thus, while expressing concern, he was lightening the atmosphere.

A more purely humorous use of Afrikaans occurs in a discussion of paternity leave. Stanley, a coloured member, used the term *maternity* twice with reference to himself and his male colleagues. Paul immediately stepped in to rectify this usage. His comment provoked great amusement among members of the Unity Forum. Over the laughter a comment from Ishmail, also coloured, was heard: "*So djy's pregnant!*". Ishmail usually speaks in a dialect approximating Respectable South African English at meetings. His comment here is striking because it violates the norms of that variety and draws on a stigmatised dialect used among coloureds to express solidarity and a shared identity. "Use of the dialect powerfully signifies the sharing of subjective communal consciousness and reality, and the claim of the speech community to communal identity" (Stone 1995: 280). This fits with Gal's (1989: 349) characterisation of the second of two ways in which resistance to dominant representation occurs: "when devalued linguistic strategies and genres are practised despite denigration, and when these devalued practices propose or

embody alternate models of the social world” (emphasis added). This comment then proposes an alternate reality in which these men are equals and friends, interacting freely and casually, not constrained by the norms of meeting behaviour. The effect is humorous and defuses the threat inherent in correcting another in a public setting. Language correction in such a setting could be extremely humiliating as the participants are all adults, seen to be fully competent members of the group.

In meetings Xhosa is used by the Xhosa-speakers when they feel unable to express themselves effectively in English. The meeting frame allows this usage and requires others simply to call for translations where necessary. Xhosa, therefore, does not have the same status as Afrikaans as the language of humour and clowning; rather it is used alongside English to air views and opinions. It appears that Xhosa is used more frequently when serious matters of concern to the workers arise. An example was the matter of retrenchment discussed at the first meeting I attended. It had to be decided at this Unity Forum meeting what to do about retrenchment in the next month or two, as there was very little work in the industry. It did not seem a possibility to send workers to other companies in the interim, as every one was experiencing the scarcity of work. A lively discussion began around this issue. It was quite clear that no one present liked the idea of retrenching workers from the company, and they tried to devise ways of avoiding it. Some suggestions were thrown out and others were discussed, until finally it seemed a consensus had been reached: thirty workers who had only been with the company one month would be retrenched as they had not yet come to rely on it as their only livelihood. Many members felt that this was acceptable even though “these guys are our brothers, because we brought them here to work”. They believed that the newcomers understood that they were taken on because there was a lot of work and that it was not necessarily going to continue. If this retrenchment was still not enough, general workers would be put on a rotation system. They would work in threes and every week one of the three would be replaced by another worker, so that everyone worked two weeks out of three and continuity was maintained as best as possible. Workers who would otherwise have been retrenched would still be receiving two out of three weeks’ pay. The workers had decided

on a retrenchment system which they felt to be fair and which offered the workers the best solution to a difficult problem, without harming the company.

Linguistically the discussion was just as interesting. Paul, the management representative, introduced the problem and explained why it had arisen. Then he invited suggestions from the members. Many volunteered their opinions, but some had to be drawn out and Paul did this by addressing them in their mother tongue, either Xhosa or Afrikaans. Paul seems to use Xhosa on occasion to bring himself closer to the Xhosa-speakers, particularly when the matter on the table affects them profoundly. The issue of retrenchment certainly belongs in this category. When questioned, Paul said that he used different languages to break the tension and to draw in shy members who felt more comfortable in their own language than in English. Anyone who hadn't spoken was then asked to contribute by the Chair, either in English or in Xhosa. Many of the contributions were in Xhosa and frequently the speakers translated for themselves when they had spoken their mind. None of the Afrikaans-speakers used Afrikaans when addressing the meeting, but they joked among themselves and replied to Paul occasionally in Afrikaans. Sometimes the Chair translated a Xhosa-speaker's contribution for those who were not entirely at home in Xhosa. One contribution was given in Xhosa and then the speaker proceeded to translate himself into Afrikaans. The others shouted him down and requested English! If anyone required a translation, they called for a change to a different channel: *faka TV1* ('put on TV1') which means 'please translate that into English'. Similarly, when Paul felt too much of the meeting was taking place in Xhosa, he asked the members why they were 'stuck on TV2'. Before changes were made in the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1993 (following the acceptance of the 1993 Constitution), TV1 was the English and Afrikaans channel, TV2 broadcast in Zulu and Xhosa and TV3 in Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho and Tswana.

It struck me as strange at first that speakers who had used English for their initial contribution, changed to Xhosa for subsequent remarks. These switches continued throughout the meeting. On one occasion during the retrenchment debate, two speakers

got into a fairly heated argument among themselves, in Xhosa. The Chair successfully stilled it and then asked the rest of the members to participate. A Xhosa man who was a particularly eloquent speaker of English then spoke out in Xhosa, saying that he understood his colleague's point of view, but he still thought that retrenching the thirty newcomers was the best way to proceed. It seemed that he had chosen Xhosa to show his colleague that they were 'brothers' and to gain his trust; in other words, for solidarity. In other cases, I think it was simply more comfortable for Xhosa-speakers to use their mother tongue and then give a summary in English once they felt they had expressed their thoughts and feelings. When I asked them at the end of the meeting why they chose particular languages, a Xhosa-speaker replied in fluent English, that "Some people, like me, is not so good in English". He added that they preferred to speak Xhosa as it was easier to say exactly what they felt without worrying about the words. Joyce, the only woman at the meeting said "You know a *potjie*?<sup>1</sup>" I nodded. "Ja, the *potjie* with the three legs - that's us." This wonderfully multilingual group, uses all the province's official languages, claiming to be like a three-legged black pot, supported by its three languages and related cultures.

Outside meetings the three-legged pot still bubbles. Although "we prefer speaking Xhosa because we are Xhosa", the workers say "we have no problem actually, what language one would like to speak it is transferred to the language that everybody can understand". This includes the three languages Xhosa, English and Afrikaans as well as the languages of smaller groups such as Zulu and Setswana. One coloured man is an accepted group member on a site where he is the only non Xhosa-speaker: "[He] *thetha* ('speaks') English, but we talk Xhosa to him" and everyone seems to understand one another. Another young Afrikaans-speaker was praised for his ability to reply appropriately to questions asked in Xhosa. He explained that the Xhosa-speakers taught him Xhosa words which he could recognise in use. He used these words along with English and Afrikaans in his replies.

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<sup>1</sup> A *potjie* is a three-legged cast iron pot traditionally used for cooking over open fires.

When asked about different styles of language used in meetings and on site, the workers provided information almost exclusively about language choice. Xhosa is the natural choice on site, English in meetings. One supervisor explained that workers can “talk some other things” on site, but that the focus must be on finishing the work on target. One of the workers added in support, “just a little bit, not too much, not so much”. For this group talking was not an activity which fitted with work on site. Although English is the main language of meetings, this presents no problems for workers: “Yes we attend the meetings even the white people they like to understand our languages so that is other communication because why we . . . from the meetings we speak English but we don't say OK if you don't understand the English you mustn't attend this meeting because we we we we say OK we can tell you what we are happen what's going on just as some other guys here they don't understand English but we explain what's going on you see.” “Try just to suggest” added another. As a result people do not feel left out because they help one another understand as the need arises.

All the workers I spoke to expressed satisfaction with the communication at the company. They felt that those who had been unable to communicate in English at all before arriving at the company had learned some English and could interact with their foremen and with outsiders like me as a result. They also felt that their superiors on the whole made an effort to speak in a way that would make it easier for them to follow, not using “first grade English”, i.e. high standard or high class English. However, exceptions were noted: using English to assert a position of power, “that is not right because if you talking<sup>2</sup> to a person that you know he understands just a bit of English, you not supposed to get deeper and deeper into English because that means you not now making things easier for him, so you don't want him to understand you [ ] you not worrying about him, so you supposed to make everything easier and easier, but it is happening actually”.

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<sup>2</sup> This may be a non-rhotic version of *you're talking* but I believe that I heard no *are*: the copula was deleted in these instances as it is in many non-native varieties of English (see Williams 1987).

Some seemed aware of the fact that their English language skills were not highly developed, claiming to speak only a little English because “we only workers” or “third grade English”. One Xhosa-speaker said: “The English that we talking to you, that’s what we’ve got, we cannot talk English as you are. But you can find that once a quarrel comes up and everybody’s angry, we will stop speaking English and we’ll talk Xhosa.” This comment was followed by laughter and nods and murmurs of agreement. It appears to acknowledge the concession workers have to make to be understood, and shows their awareness that they can refuse to co-operate. It may also be that it is easier to argue in Xhosa, allowing the words to come out without being censored. It may also explain why some of the workers seem so reluctant to speak, both on site and at the Unity Forum.

It is widely agreed that Afrikaans is used for jokes. “Most language we joke about it in Afrikaans because there the people are coloured they speak Afrikaans sometimes someone *vloek* (‘curse’/‘swear’) jokes is *vloeks*.” Jokes are made about Afrikaans-speakers as well as in Afrikaans. For example, “Like Gamat *gaan die kant en daai kant*” (‘goes to and fro’) makes fun of the Afrikaans-speaker using his own language, perhaps imitating him. Some interviewees claimed that Xhosa-speakers use Afrikaans among themselves, even with no Afrikaans-speakers around. To contest something that had been said, for example, “*Moenie kak praat nie!*” (‘Don’t talk shit’) could be used. The choice of Afrikaans in this context may be characterised as code-divergence, i.e. the emphasis of difference from the hearer by making particular linguistic choices (Giles & Johnson 1981). The speaker expresses stronger disagreement by distancing him/herself from the addressee with a divergent language choice, than would be conveyed in the unmarked language. The coloured workers, of course, also use Afrikaans among themselves for other functions. It is the unmarked language choice when they talk to one another.

### 5.3 Terms of Address

Although the meeting plays an important role in labour matters in the company, the atmosphere is casual and relaxed and people seem happy to express their opinions. Everyone speaks when they want to, without waiting to be called upon. Rigid turn-taking rules are not in force, as would be the case in many business meeting settings. The Chair seldom has to call on or silence a speaker, except perhaps in cases of personal conflict. The informality can be seen particularly in the terms of address that are used among all members of the Unity Forum. The most common and unmarked usage is to address everyone by their first name. In some cases members are referred to by surname because that is the name they are known by. This does not signal a higher status or distance from the speaker. The workers interviewed said that in meetings ‘normal’ or ‘real’ names are used: “On that case we use normal names, doesn’t matter whether it’s a surname or a name, but we usually use what is known by everybody: if they call you by your surname, then we using surname; if they call you by name, we using name.” The Chair is usually called *Sali*, his surname, by members of the Unity Forum, unless they choose to draw attention to his role in the meetings, in which case he is referred to as *Mr Chairman*. The standard practice of using first names is in keeping with the general ethos of the company as it emphasises equality rather than relations of power. The company structure is flat, aiming to eliminate status distinction as far as possible and to respect all members of the organisation as individuals. The ubuntu philosophy of working as a team can be seen in many aspects of the company, including the Unity Forum.

Some speakers address the Chair as *Mr Chairman* in accordance with a hierarchical (+P, +/- D) politeness system (Scollon & Scollon 1995)<sup>3</sup> which recognises his status in the meeting. The choice of this address form signals a recognition of a position of power within the meeting frame. Chick (1991) has suggested that Afrikaans-speakers prefer a style which emphasises status differences but minimises distance. Two of the four speakers who used the formal title to address the Chair were Afrikaans-speakers; the other two were Xhosa-speakers. It is difficult and even dangerous to draw any conclusions from

such a small sample. Perhaps Chick's hypothesis remains to be tested among coloured speakers of Afrikaans. (He does not make the racial or ethnic categories of his subjects clear.)

Joyce is addressed by her first name by all members except the two Unity Forum members who acted as Chairs. Sali refers to her as *Mama*, a term which shows respect for her age. According to Gowlett (1986: 5), "respect for age is one of the pillars of Black society." This may explain why a respectful term is given by one Xhosa-speaker to another, older Xhosa-speaker. Mike filled in as Chair when Sali was unable to attend, and used a different sort of address for Joyce. He called her *Sis' Joyce*, a term used among peers and friends, but also indicating respect, i.e. solidarity politeness (-P, -D). Although Sali and Mike use different forms, both use terms which are not applied to other members of the Unity Forum. This may be attributed to the fact that she is the only female member of the Unity Forum, somehow constituting a category of her own which deserves special attention.

Paul is addressed as *Mr Paul* by certain members of the Unity Forum. This seems to be an attempt to combine hierarchical and solidarity politeness systems. The speaker feels that he is lower on the company hierarchy than Paul, but wants to minimise the distance between them so he combines a respectful title with a first name. This is one of many possible terms of address which are used for him. On occasion he is *Mr Webb* or simply Paul. Other members of the Unity Forum are also addressed by name or surname and occasionally as *Mr*.

Paul refers to everyone by name, using the same conventions for as everyone else, i.e. using either name or surname, depending on which is known and accepted. He frequently addresses the group as *you guys*, a casual, friendly usage which seems to be accepted. Mike also uses this and *Gents* when addressing the group as a whole. On one occasion Paul exclaimed *Madoda!* ('men') in mock horror when the Unity Forum members seemed

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<sup>3</sup> All further use of these terms is based on Scollon & Scollon (1995).

uncertain of a procedure he had expected them to know. The use of all these terms could be criticised for excluding Joyce, but as she does not seem to take exception, nor will I. Perhaps this is why the Chairs compensate with special terms of respect and solidarity?

There are also other names which are used among workers at the company: they are the nicknames that workers use among themselves, which were generally agreed to be inappropriate for meetings: "There are times that we are not using that names, like the meetings, whatever gathering is, you know, we don't have to use those because we must do the right thing, it's not a joke actually. So there are times where you can use those names, there are times that we can't." One of the workers also suggested that not using a nickname on site or out of the meeting context, may be seen as a negative evaluation of the addressee. This may be because nicknames signal solidarity (-P, -D) relationships, group belonging and being liked, whereas 'real' names are read as deference politeness (-P, +D), indicating distance from the addressee: "Once you are on the meeting then I mean I would say there is a respect in the meeting, you must be serious, but outside you can say anything, you can call me whatever you want as long I know you are joking, you're not serious, the only point is that if you are serious then I'm gonna think you see negative if I can see on your face you joking...".

The workers interviewed on site differed somewhat in the types of nicknames coined. One group of workers (in the yard) gave one another names based on their personalities or positions. Among them was *Umlilo* ('fire') for a fiery young man, *Gula* ('sick') for a hypochondriac and *Crane* for the crane operator, whose surname was apparently also Crane - the cause of some amusement. On the Siltek site names such as *Platneus* ('flat nose') and *Grootkop* ('big head') seemed the norm; names which workers on the Italtile site found ridiculous and unlikely. The Italtile group gave the following reply to my request for nicknames: "No that's is not a serious happen ( ) Xhosa nation you have got your name and your surname then there's other thing ( ) there's other thing at the other side I'm Radebe that like Madiba ( ) ja the tribe just like that, we like to call it them like that." The Italtile workers interviewed were all Xhosa-speakers. They seemed to agree

that giving nicknames such as those mentioned above was not common practice among the Xhosa nation: using tribe names seemed to fulfil the same solidarity functions for this group. They found the other nicknames very amusing all the same.

#### 5.4 Company Culture

In Chapter Three corporate culture is defined as the values and beliefs shared by the people in an organisation. This set of beliefs emphasises a particular aspect of corporate life, making, for example, individual people or their functions more important than say power hierarchies. Cape Town Construction combines elements of the person and job cultures, viewing the individual as the pivot on which the organisation turns (person culture) and relying on co-operation and team work to get the job done (job culture). This combination ties in well with the ubuntu philosophy so popular in South African management at present. As in the philosophy of ubuntu, the corporate culture of the company places emphasis on trust and community. People are considered the company's most valuable resource and they are cared for by the company. The flat organisational structure allows a smooth and direct flow of communication, eliminating a great deal of miscommunication. The decentralised power base in such an organisation makes it easy to approach all members of the organisation, as power differences are limited.

A co-operative team spirit prevails in the company; people feel part of a larger whole. As one of the workers put it: "Here in this company we don't feel as we are employee we feel as we are a company so that good to see our leader, Mr Martin Marais ( ) we must feel as this company mustn't go down because we are also in company here although we don't get shares during the year... we act as a family." His view was echoed by another: "We are together". The workers also told me proudly of the newspaper the company produces: it is called *Simunye* ('we are one') and the name "came from us.. from the workers" to express the feeling of unity that exists among them. This title is also an intertextual reference to a television channel's jingle which reflects the changes in South African race relations in recent years (the new TV1 which broadcasts in English, Zulu, Xhosa, Seswati and SiNdebele) (SABC Language Policy 1997).

Communication is a central part of the organisation, holding the people together and spreading the company culture and news. Members of the company are informed about its successes and failures, its procedures and problems, its aims. All responses to my question about whether communication at CTC was good were positive. The workers felt that everyone in the company tried to ensure that those they communicated with understood their message. They translate for one another where necessary and speakers of English speak a basic English that is accessible to Xhosa-speakers. One of the workers expressed gratitude to the company for providing employees with an opportunity to go to school; an experience which seemed to mean a great deal to employees and which taught them communication skills in Xhosa and English, among other things: “Yes I think so ( ) about communication in this company ( ) very very important for instance.. for example there are some guys they didn’t get the school since they are born but they got chance to go to school and then you can know how to communicate with your foreman, you can know how to communicate with somebody who comes in the site just like you they ask something it is easy to answer him or her, something like that.. I think so the communication is very good, we have it... Because we got uh from Sub A to the Standard 10.. company give us that chance ( ) and also the company they pay for it”.

Some said that the company was their family and they felt at home there: “Ja as the man says we work just like a family on this company because nobody can afraids to each other you see.. as you know before you.. we black men we was afraid to speak to the white people because the white people was far away from us you know, so even now we can sit and eat together and we then communication ( ) the job are we doing is a quality job because we are ha-.. we are communicated you see a quality job which the client also can be happy also to see how we work and ( ) then that is going to give us a chance even give the company a chance to get some more jobs because why the communication give us uh uh give us uh great knowledge you see, yes ...”. These comments make it clear that people on site are aware of the efforts that have been made to improve communication in the company and some of the effects this has had. They attribute the company’s success to its

willingness to teach its people and speak to them openly about all matters. Communicating makes for understanding which leads to quality performance which brings more work and keeps the company able to care for its people. So the cycle continues.

Under such circumstances one would expect meetings to be pleasant, friendly occasions where no one was afraid to speak their mind and disagreements and misunderstandings were ironed out. Members of the company would trust one another and be willing to listen to differing points of view, whether cultural or personal. These are indeed features of Unity Forum meetings.

### **5.5 Analysis of Language Use in Meetings**

This section will look more closely at how English, Xhosa and Afrikaans are used in the Unity Forum meetings by examining extracts from three meetings. The extracts are drawn from field notes, audio and video recordings. The subheadings are based on the major functions of language in the meetings. This type of categorisation is informed by the ethnography of communication which focuses on the functions of language and how they are realised in interaction. It involves a systematic analysis of context as a frame within which form meets function. Built into its theory and methodology is “an intentional openness to discovery of the variety of forms and functions available for communication” (Schiffrin 1994: 137). The analysis in this section will examine the different forms used for performing particular functions, focusing on the functions which are most common in Unity Forum meetings.

Some of the common functions are not discussed under their own subheadings as they do not contribute to the understanding of intercultural communication, which is the subject of this work. Other functions may be seen in all the extracts and attention will be drawn to those although a separate subheading is not included. One important function which is not discussed in detail is that of informing. Frequently there is some piece of information which has to be shared with the Unity Forum who in turn must pass it on to the

workforce. These moves often come from Paul and are linguistically uninteresting as they do not include any interaction. They are monologues carrying information and say very little about the group. It is worth noting, however, that other speakers do not deliver such monologues. Another type of talk which will not be discussed in detail is teacher-talk. A few members of the group occasionally correct others in their usage or pronunciation of words, explain company rules to them, check their understanding of a concept or procedure. Teacher-talk will be noted when it occurs, but it is not considered a chief function of the meetings and is not assigned a subsection of its own.

Some of the most pleasant moments in Unity Forum meetings revolve around congratulations and thanks. Some examples of such moves were Paul thanking the Unity Forum members for their service to the company; Unity Forum members expressing the thanks of all employees to the company for generous annual bonuses and winners of safety awards being congratulated with enthusiastic applause. Such moments make the team spirit within the company clear and show that meetings are not only about difficulties, but also take note of success and satisfaction.

### 5.5.1 Planning

The Unity Forum has the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of the company. As a result, planning and decision-making moves are common in meetings. These start with reference to an item on the agenda, which is often followed by an explanation as to why the item occurred on the agenda or what exactly the problem is. Once this has been established a suggestion is usually made which is either supported or contested, leading to further discussion and an eventual decision. In the extract below, absenteeism is raised and the problem explained. The speakers are Xolani (X), Joyce (J) and Paul (P)<sup>4</sup>:

#### Extract 1

X: OK, point three is labour relations [ ] um.. absenteeism, that's point one, that's 1  
point number one.. can anyone raise that point... why is it there?

<sup>4</sup> Transcription conventions used here are explained in the methodology section in Chapter One.

J: Ja, is there for because.. umm.. now the people now is a lot of uh.. hearing of people who are not coming in to, coming to do the work and then there's no report and the people they didn't say nothing ... and then after that now you must ask the people they don't phone 5

X: Ja I think this point ... if I'm right is there because we've got lot of absenteeism Mr Paul and .. the people they just stay away from work and when they came back they come without doctor's certificate without phoning or informing any.. any.. uh.. body on site but they come with the word that they said they went to the witchdoctor so that is the biggest problem that we have on site ...for example on my site we've got four guys who just stayed away and when they came back they said "No I went to the witchdoctor" so there was no proof.. there's no proof... so we said at the Caucus meeting ..we have to come up with a [.. solution... 10

P: [Let me just... let me 15  
just tell you I've done quite a lot of reading up on it ... you all know that the Medical Aid Bill has been passed... so there's a new law that Zuma passed re: medical aids and in that law, that bill, um.. legislation - that is what one would call it - she doesn't recognise witchdoctors and it's basically.. I'll just read this to you it says "Alternative healers" which includes witchdoctors "Despite cultural sensitivities the Medical Schemes Act still restricts payments by medical aids only to those practitioners registered in terms of any law" uh.. ... "On this basis it is probably appropriate for employers to resist" this is the important part "accepting the sick notes of traditional healers".... we must decide in this meeting whether we accept a witchdoctor or whether we don't accept a witchdoctor .. and that we must 20  
decide.. I'm not gonna make that decision on my own 25

Joyce responds to the Chair's question as to why absenteeism is on the agenda for the meeting. She is explaining that absenteeism was raised as a matter for discussion because many workers were simply taking time off work and returning without any proof of illness and without having telephoned the company so that arrangements could be made on site. An instance of self-repair occurs in line 4, possibly as Joyce realises that her initial sentence

would be difficult to finish. Xolani (who is acting Chair until the appointed Chair arrives) elaborates on what has been said, emphasising what he sees as the biggest problem, namely alleged visits to the *witchdoctor*. He believes that employees take advantage of the fact that most traditional healers do not issue certificates to stay away from work without reason. Employers then have to take these employees at their word if they claim to have visited a traditional healer, even if they have no proof, because the healer may not have issued any documentation. The workforce recognised this as a problem which they felt needed to be solved and raised it as a matter to be discussed at the Unity Forum.

Joyce and Xolani simply aim to raise the matter and make clear why it is important to discuss it. Joyce, not working on site has heard of the problem, whereas Xolani has seen evidence on his own site. Paul interrupts Xolani to provide information which he feels may contribute to the decision which has to be made to solve the problem. His aim is to make sure that the Unity Forum members are aware of the legislation pertaining to this matter, so that they can make an informed decision. He seems to feel that he is entitled to interrupt because he has additional information. He opens with *Let me just* suggesting that the interruption is a small one and perhaps trying to minimise the threat of the face threatening act (FTA) of interrupting (Brown & Levinson 1987)<sup>5</sup>. The use of *let* also creates the impression of asking for permission to speak, rather than simply taking a turn. In these ways he attempts to minimise status or power differences which exist between him and the other members of the Unity Forum and aims to make the relationship one of solidarity (-P, -D). He further links himself to the Unity Forum by saying *we must decide*. This comment includes everyone and puts them all on the same level as contributors to the decision. There is a slight imposition involved as the statement calls for action from everyone, thus infringing on their need for independence (negative face needs). The statement is made bald on record, that is, using no politeness strategies, but rather speaking with maximal efficiency in accordance with Grice's (1975) maxims (Brown & Levinson 1987). His final comment that he will not *make that decision on my own* isolates

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<sup>5</sup> All further references to face threatening acts will be abbreviated as FTA and are based on Brown & Levinson (1987).

him to some extent from the others, although he intends to include them. It suggests that if he chose he could make the decision alone, whereas no other Unity Forum member could say the same. This seems to slightly counteract the solidarity strategies he used earlier, although it is safe to assume that his intention is to build solidarity.

After Joyce and Xolani explained why the matter of absenteeism was on the agenda, members of the Unity Forum discussed the problem and its effect on the company at some length. It is pointed out that many traditional healers are not registered and cannot produce certificates; some do not even have official premises so that they can provide contact details on a sick note. This makes it difficult to allow workers to consult traditional healers at all, as they cannot prove that they have been. If unofficial notes are accepted, anyone can claim to be a *witchdoctor* and workers can even write their own notes. The final point makes it clear that further planning is necessary and prompts the following discussion between Paul (P), Jackson (J) and Eric (E):

Extract 2

P: That's why I say we can't go half. We can't say that uh we gonna accept a sick certificate from a witchdoctor because it can be any certificate.. it can be any piece of paper... we can say possibly that it must have his office details.. but a lot of them as you know operate... they don't have that kind of information .. so must we go through a registered witchdoctor or a registered medical practitioner? 1 5

/ja/, /mm/

J: He can't just write a letter without a stamp... so he need a stamp.. if he is a permanent the stamp will be there.. so I don't think this a serious issue.. to me seems like that.. because I think the guys just use that as to see somebody if you say 'I've been to the witchdoctor' I will survive.. so if you mention to the workforce everyone, doesn't matter you go to the witchdoctor or to the doctor, you bring doctor's certificate.. that is solution I see somewhere you will see that can be stop there and then you won't ..hear anyone now to say I was on the witchdoctor because the guys just using that to survive.. to me seems like that 10

P: What do the rest of you guys think?

15

E: Ja, to support Jackson what he has just said .. we talked about this and we came to the conclusion that this case is serious for someone who is working.. so he's got to obey the rules and we came up to a point that if someone is sick he must have something like a doctor's certificate or a witchdoctor's accepted certificate not just a letter and it's up to him .. he must make sure that there is something that is acceptable.. like the registered witchdoctor or the doctor

20

Jackson is outspoken about criticising the prolonged debate around witchdoctors. He feels that the Unity Forum members are getting unnecessarily concerned about a matter which is easily dealt with. He sees people who use witchdoctors as an excuse when they have not really been sick as the problem and believes that the focus should be on stopping that kind of absenteeism, rather than on the kind of certificate which is accepted. He goes on record saying 'I don't think this is a serious issue' after a great deal of discussion has already taken place. This statement threatens his own positive face as he opens himself up to criticism, as well as threatening the face of the group who have all participated in drawing out the debate. Paul's negative face comes under particular threat as it is his suggestion that is specifically attacked. However, twice in the turn Jackson hedges his criticism with *to me seems like that*, making the statement a personal opinion and reducing the threat to himself and others. This type of expression (also 'I guess', 'It seems etc.) is one of the many ways in which hedging can be achieved. The use of prosody, particles, adverbials, parentheticals and lexical items are other possible strategies. Hedges are an important resource for the realisation of politeness strategies and "one of the basic motives for departing from the maximally efficient talk that the Maxim's [Grice's Maxims of Conversation 1975] define" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 271).

Paul's next turn is a question aimed at eliciting information from the group as a whole. This kind of turn controlling should be done by the Chair of a meeting. Paul is therefore speaking out of turn here and does so without apology. Members of the Unity Forum do not seem to notice or they have become accustomed to his playing a special role in the

meetings, perhaps as the person who brings information from management and from legal documents. The question receives an answer which is clearly marked as a direct response to it and to the previous statement. Eric begins with an affirmative marker and then the phrase *to support Jackson what he has just said*, both showing clearly the relation of his turn to the previous turns. He uses an earlier discussion to give weight to his argument, using the conclusion reached there as a supporting quote. The key phrases are repeated (lines 19 - 21) to ensure that they are clearly understood. He places the responsibility firmly on each worker to provide acceptable documentation as proof of illness.

### Extract 3

Paternity leave is a matter raised unexpectedly to be discussed, as it was not on the agenda. Jackson takes the opportunity to explain the problem when Sali provides an opening with a question which was probably intended as a closing. Here Paul (P), Jackson (J), Stanley (S) and Ishmail (I) discuss the matter:

- Sali: Is there anything else under labour relations? 1
- J: mm ja Chairman... uh.. I think um about a guy on site.. he was taking paternity leave  
 I think last week on Thursday... what he did he just take paternity leave on  
 Thursday, but on Friday he send a letter to... to site that is for Thursday, Friday and  
 Monday.. uh I tried to find out to to the student what he did book on Mr ( ) 5  
 because to me it look to paternity leave... yes it is but the student just write absent  
 those three days.. So I'm try to explain her that guy must be paid for those three  
 days because we agreed for three days paternity leave... but I think he phoned for  
 Mr Webb.. but.. what Mr Webb replied him this is too late, it's not too late, he's  
 just doing wrong procedure because first he's just take it, but first thing you must 10  
 do is you must report that before you take paternity leave [ ] So I want to hear for  
 the Unity Forum and Mr Webb as well what is the yearly procedure for paternity  
 leave and we must write it down if the guy's doing a wrong procedure, must know  
 procedure, rules and regulations of paternity leave: what the guy must first do  
 before he takes paternity leave.. I think this fall under labour relations. 15

S: Mr Chairman, I think that is right.. if you take maternity leave you know in that time your wife is gonna get a baby.. or you know you wife is pregnant and you know that's gonna come and you know you gonna have maternity leave... so I can't see a person not putting it in before the time

P: Firstly, let's just get the maternity leave with an "m" goes with the mother ... 20  
paternity with a "p" goes with the father

I : *So dji's pregnant!* ('so you're pregnant')

/Laughter/

P: [through the noise] maternity is for mama, paternity is for papa

/More laughter and remarks/ 25

Sali moves to close the topic of labour relations using the formulaic phrase 'Is there anything else ...?' This move is interpreted as a prompt or invitation for further contributions and Jackson provides a matter for discussion. He begins somewhat hesitantly, using fillers and pausing frequently. This may have to do with the subject matter or with his proficiency in English. Other turns suggest that his hesitation is caused by an uncertainty about how to introduce this topic, as he can be outspoken when he wishes to be. His turn contains a fair number of repetitions, particularly of the key words *paternity leave* and *procedure*. He wants to focus the attention of everyone present on the procedure for paternity leave, so that all workers can be treated fairly according to the same rules. He ends his turn by reminding the Unity Forum of the relevance of what he has said to the Chair's question. Jackson's intention in this extract is to raise a procedural problem so that a consistent and final ruling can be made, i.e. to initiate a planning discussion. However, his aims are temporarily ignored while the group relaxes and has a laugh. When the joke is over they return to planning a solution.

Stanley acknowledges the status implicit in the role of Chair and addresses the Chair accordingly, using a hierarchical politeness system (+P, +/- D). Terms of addresses are discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter (in section 5.3). Paul corrects Stanley's use of *maternity* instead of *paternity* in a teacher-like manner, speaking clearly and stressing

the syllables which differentiate the two words. This 'lesson' causes great amusement among all members, but it is Ishmail's comment which is heard above the mirth (line 22). He code-switches to Afrikaans, marking the comment as standing outside normal meeting discourse. Blom & Gumperz (1972) characterise this kind of switch as situational, as it marks a change in the participants' definition of the social event within a particular setting. Rather than contributing to the discussion of paternity leave, his remark focuses on the social relationship between himself and Stanley. Myers-Scotton (1993) prefers to see switching as speaker-motivated, with the speaker enacting different identities through code-choice and code-switches. Although Ishmail's remark gently ridicules Stanley's mistake, it does so in the code which is common to them and therefore shows solidarity. Brown & Levinson (1987) refer to this type of involvement strategy as positive politeness.

Paul's reiteration of the lesson through the laughter and noise seems to be intended to provide further amusement, rather than aiming for extra clarification. His use of alliteration links with the common words for 'mother' and 'father'. The switch may also be metaphorical or poetic, using the alliterative effect to draw another laugh. The laughter and remarks which follow stand outside the meeting frame and serve as an interval before serious discussion is resumed.

#### Extract 4

When the new five star award system is explained to the group, they suggest that they should be rewarded for the extra work they will have to do. Mike is the first to propose a raise, a suggestion which receives a number of supporters. To avoid confusion, I have used full names for participants who only speak once. The main participants are Mike (M), Paul (P), Joseph (J) and Xolani (X):

M: So now you talking about money, you making it more difficult, shouldn't you 1

increase their the... uh [ ... pay out

Ishmail: [incentive

P: The.. the record-keeping, the.. that is basically the site manager record-keeping...

Jika meetings is the workforce [nodding].. ja we can certainly look at that.. no 5  
 problem.. no problem. What do you think we should make it?

/mm/

M: Maybe maybe just another ten rand again

J: Hey? ... for too much work?

/laughter/ 10

M: I'm suggesting that, I'm not saying that

J: I say eighty rands

P: eighty bucks

X: on top of that?

M: on top of that! 15

/laughter/

X: Are you not saying eighty rand on top of sixty? Ooo

/laughter/

J: You must go to the maths class

M: Guys, what do you.. what do you say? 20

Jackson: I'm second that Joseph

Stanley: Ja, push it up another twenty, ja

This extract shows a negotiation in which several members of the Unity Forum take part. The matter under discussion affects everybody, and concerns money, so there is a strong motivation to contribute. It is interesting to note that although turns are short, there is no interruption and everybody participates at an equal level. Paul and Mike are part of the negotiation in much the same way as the other members. They are not enacting their status positions as a representative of management and chair of the meeting respectively.

Paul's initial response to the raise request is that it is not necessary as the Site Managers are the people who will have extra work to do (line 4). He begins to enumerate the things that they will have to do in addition and can only think one item for his list. He hesitates at the realisation and then continues, now naming tasks the workforce will have to attend to.

He seems to become aware of the possibility of extra work for them and accepts the suggestion as reasonable, asking the Unity Forum what the increase should be. Mike is the first to make a proposal, but it is quickly contested by Joseph who feels the extra work deserves a greater reward. His shocked exclamation in line 9 gets a laugh from the group. Mike immediately adds a disclaimer, distancing himself from the suggestion he made, explaining that it was merely a suggestion and can be changed. The distinction between *suggesting* and *saying* is interesting: *saying* seems to indicate a more definite proposition. Joseph then raises his hand as if bidding at an auction and makes his bid of eighty rand. Paul echoes this suggestion, appearing to consider it. Xolani asks if this amount will be added to the old amount. Mike finds this question ridiculous and repeats it in a tone of amazement in line 15, making it clear that he thinks it ludicrous. Several members of the Unity Forum join in his amusement at this preposterous suggestion, knowing that such an increase will not be given. Xolani realises his mistake and clarifies it for himself. Joseph mocks him by suggesting he attend the maths classes the company is running for school children. The comment is teasing and playful and Xolani accepts it in this spirit. Paul repeats his earlier question to get more opinions on the raise. Joseph's suggestion receives support from Jackson and Stanley and becomes the accepted proposal. Jackson's supporting move follows standard meeting format of seconding motions which have been put forward. Stanley on the other hand, speaks casually using a colloquial expression to support the increase. Paul's task as the management representative is to take the proposal to management.

### **5.5.2 Explaining and Clarifying**

There are various kinds of explanation which take place in the meetings. These include explaining: why a particular item has appeared on the agenda, what a word or concept means, a procedure. Paul has a large share of the turns which relate to explaining company procedures and the use of particular terms. Joyce's explanation of why absenteeism was on the agenda is a different sort of explanation and was discussed above under section 5.5.1. In addition to his explanation of the terms 'maternity' and 'paternity' in the same section, Paul frequently explains procedures or rules. Examples include his explanation of the rules for safety competitions and the procedure for the new five star rating system.

These examples will not be discussed in this chapter as they are almost exclusively single speaker extracts and do not contribute to the examination of intercultural interactions.

Extract 5

The extract discussed below illustrates a clarification interaction, in which one of the Unity Forum members attempts to raise a topic, but has some difficulty until the topic is clearly defined. The participants are Willem (W), who raises the matter; Paul (P); Ishmail (I); Jackson (J) and Stanley (S):

- W: Mr Chairman, before we go further absenteeisms.. we discuss it but this is for us 1  
 about warnings ( ) to your bonus... did we discuss... I think we forgot about that  
 [laughs]
- P: warnings with your bonus
- W: what we discuss last year 5
- P: ja... I... uh [papers turning]  
 /chatter/  
 we ba-... just correct me... if.. if.. if I'm incorrect here that we basically said that  
 um if a person is absent... we then go and look at that absenteeism record when it  
 comes to bonus time... Is that what we said? 10
- I : and warnings  
 /mm/, /warnings/
- P: and we look at warnings at bonus time  
 /ja/, /yes/
- J: first warning, second warning 15
- I : first warning gets seventy five percent of his bonus... but we made a decision on  
 that
- S: No we didn't, we carried it over.. we said we would discuss it [ this year  
 [ /this year/, /ja/
- P: OK well, let's do that then 20

The opening move is made tentatively, starting as an interruption, recalling a topic discussed earlier and explaining the relevance of this new point to it. The turn contains the beginnings of a question in line 2, which is answered by the same speaker in a manner which suggests that the matter should have been discussed but was overlooked. He laughs nervously at the end of his turn, uncertain whether his comment will offend anyone or whether they have understood what he wishes to discuss. His concerns seem justified as Paul replies with an echo of what was said, showing no signs of comprehension. Willem tries to elaborate, reminding the Unity Forum that the effect of warnings on annual bonuses had been discussed at a previous meeting. Paul still seems perplexed and begins paging through his notes in search of something that will cast some light on the matter for him. After some frowning and searching he remarks that absenteeism should be taken into account when calculating bonuses. He remains uncertain as to whether this is the matter to be discussed. His turn is littered with lengthy pauses, hesitation and hedging, in case he is mistaken. He ends with a direct question asking for input from the group. Ishmail uses this opportunity to clarify that it is in fact warnings which will affect bonuses (line 11). His explanation is followed by a chorus of *warnings* and other echoes expressing the group's agreement with this explanation. Ishmail adds that a decision had been made which stipulated the percentage which would be subtracted for each warning. He recites the first part of his turn like a list, ending on a rising intonation, implying that this item is one of several on the list. However, this claim is contested: many feel that the decision was carried over for discussion at the current meeting. Paul concludes the clarification part of the discussion as everyone now understands what has to be done. In closing the clarification, he acknowledges the matter, accepts it as a topic for discussion and simultaneously opens the discussion.

This extract is an excellent example of how members of the company work together to reach an understanding. If the topic had not been clarified in advance, the discussion would have been chaotic and unproductive with various people speaking at cross-purposes. By dwelling on topic clarification until everyone understood the matter in hand, the Unity Forum ensured that they worked together towards the same goal. This does not mean that

all conflict can be eliminated in this way, but the conflict will contribute to a final decision by raising various points of view, rather than revolving around differing interpretations of the main issue. Gumperz (1982: 21) believes that people rely on matching interpretive frames to “distinguish among permissible interpretive options”. Miscommunication arises as a result of a mismatch of these frames. It is precisely this sort of miscommunication which has been avoided by matching frames at the outset. Fruitful debate followed this introduction with some argument initially over whether reducing bonuses was fair and later over the percentages to be deducted.

#### Extract 6

The next example again illustrates the clarification that has to be done on occasion to ensure that the Unity Forum members are working towards a common goal. Paul has suggested taking away the term *core team* in order to shake up complacent members of the organisation. Xolani (X) seems uncertain as to the wisdom of the suggestion. Mike (M) and Willem (W) are the other participants:

X: But I don't know... I mean why do we take away the name *core team*? I just want  
to clear myself on what is the.. the good reason 1

M: You see Xolani I think what Paul means by that, is if you say *core team*.. the  
minute the guy falls under the core team it means he can't he can't be retrenched..  
but now we only take away the word *core* and we still gonna have our full quota of 5  
people that we require

W: Ja but as you said we looking at performance but uh.. according to performance if  
the man's performance is bad, then he should have a warning, but that doesn't  
happen on site

Xolani is uncertain as to what justification the Unity Forum has for going through with Paul's proposal for taking away the term and category 'core team'. His request for clarification is slightly threatening, as it implies a criticism of the suggestion: in asking for a *good reason* he seems to express doubt that one exists. Mike, as Chair takes it upon

himself to answer Xolani's query. In order to do so he has to speak on behalf of another person who is present, something which does not happen often at Unity Forum meetings. He begins by pointing out that he *thinks* this was the intention of the previous speaker, Paul, giving himself an escape route if he misinterprets Paul's intentions. He continues in words which are presumably intended to echo Paul's, but finds himself unable to complete the sentence and recasts it in his own way. The explanation of Paul's point hinges on the use of language: all that was suggested was changing the name of the core team, not actually getting rid of its members. Mike explains that people who are part of the core team do not work as well as they should because they believe themselves to be above the system of warnings and beyond retrenchment. By providing this explanation he implicitly offers support for Paul's argument. Willem adds that anyone whose performance is poor should receive a warning for poor performance, but this is not happening on sites because site managers overlook the faults of long-time employees and do not issue warnings to them. As a result, new workers receive warnings for being a minute or two late whereas more established workers seldom get warnings even for repeated offences. This makes it impossible to retrench older workers even if their performance is poor, because it is not on record. Willem's comment implies a criticism of the Site Managers and their unequal treatment of workers. He seems to feel that the argument about what to change to improve productivity is focusing only on the workers' attitudes and not addressing other aspects of the problem.

#### Extract 7

A little later in the discussion Xolani (X) is still trying to work out why taking away the words *core team* is likely to have any effect. Paul (P) tries to explain his reasoning, this time speaking for himself. Mike (M) attempts to close the discussion at the end of this extract:

X: In other words you say now you take away LIFO<sup>6</sup>, then I can understand.. if you say you take away LIFO, then I understand, but not if you take away the words *core team* 1

P: Hang on, let's just clarify this. If we looking at retrenchment, we talking about [writing on the board] skills, we talking about service, then LIFO and then designated persons... [numbering items on the board] one, two, three, four... We not talking about core team, core team doesn't come into this, there's no core team here [pointing].. what you talking about core team will influence LIFO 5

X: That's what we saying

P: But what we saying is that people think because they the core team none of these influence the core team, none of them, because they the core team.. not even performance... That's what you guys are saying.. so if we take away the core team everyone [ 10

M: [So does everyone agree we gonna work on that system?

Xolani tried to rephrase the argument in a way that he understands, to interpret in his own way. His turn contains some repetition of the phrase *core team* and *LIFO*. He makes it clear that *LIFO* is a term he understands, whereas taking away the words *core team* seems to him like splitting hairs. Paul tries to respond to his query by clarifying the difference between 'core team' and 'LIFO'. He writes the four retrenchment criteria on the board to assist with his explanation:

- (1) skills
- (2) service
- (3) LIFO
- (4) DP

While doing so he speaks the list with rising intonation at the first two items, creating the expectation that there are further items to come; he precedes *LIFO* with a stressed *then*, emphasising its place third on the hierarchy; and the final item is spoken with falling intonation towards the end, signalling the end of a list (line 4 - 6). He repeats the main

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<sup>6</sup> LIFO is an acronym for 'last in first out', a standard retrenchment criterion in industry in South Africa.

point that the core team plays no role in the retrenchment process, negating the phrase *core team* three times. This explanation is again a teacher-like turn, with Paul carefully revising retrenchment with the Unity Forum. He ends by saying that there is connection between LIFO and the core team as Xolani has suggested. Xolani agrees with this assessment, but seems unclear as to why misunderstanding still persists. His agreement ends on a rising intonation which sounds like surprise or confusion. Paul explains further by pointing out that although Xolani has correctly identified a connection between core team and LIFO, core team members are not aware of the fact that the other retrenchment criteria apply to them. Thus they rest on their laurels after working with the company long enough to be saved by LIFO, which is why Paul would prefer to take the words *core team* away so that everyone is treated in the same way in all matters. There is again repetition in his turn, emphasising *none* and showing that the perception that none of the criteria effect core team should be addressed.

### 5.5.3 Complaining

The Unity Forum is also a forum for discussing problems in the company and complaints that have been raised by workers. Unity Forum members often bring the queries of others to the table to be discussed and resolved. This is their duty as a representative body. Some of the complaints which are dealt with arise out of the meeting itself and are not brought in from outside. The extract below illustrates a complaint of this kind which arose out of a discussion of whether and how warnings should affect bonuses. Willem (W) understands a bonus as being a gift from the company and is unhappy with the way in which gifts are to be administered. Paul (P) tries to make sense of the system for him:

#### Extract 8

W: So if I want to give you that taperecorder that's a gift it doesn't matter who or what  
you are it's a gift.. so I don't know why you must take the bonus away 1

P: What's a bonus for, Willem? Why does the company give a bonus? It's not because  
you a nice guy

W: I know!

5

P: So what's a bonus for?

W: ... for your performance

P: You can't look at a bonus as a gift like in a Christmas gift .. A bonus is there to reward you for good performance ..it's a gift because it's not guaranteed.. that's the best way to explain it... If the company's not performing well we can't give a bonus .. 10  
 so.. what we saying is when the company is performing well we can give a bonus and we want to give a bonus.. to those people that have helped the company perform well ...But it's like if you take.. uh Amakhosi, Kaiser Chiefs OK... if you take them and they know that if they win or they lose, each player is gonna get R100000.. Do you think they really gonna play well? Does it matter to them if they win or lose? 15

/chuckles/, /hmm/, /mm/

[Paul illustrates his point further by telling a story in Xhosa about two dogs who fight viciously over a piece of meat because they are seldom fed. If they are given meat every day, they will not need to fight because they know that they will get food again.]

Willem is querying the consistency of the definition of a bonus as a gift. His aim in raising this point seems to be to attempt to secure bonuses for all workers. Perhaps he feels that his own bonus is under threat under the proposed system, or perhaps he is fighting in the interest of others. Paul immediately questions Willem's understanding of why bonuses are given. He suggests that Willem has misunderstood the concept of bonuses with his comment in lines 3 - 4. Willem angrily retorts that he is aware of the correct definition, using high volume and rising intonation in line 5. Paul's reaction to the complaint is to decrease its validity by breaking down the definition that is being used and replacing it with his own. His definition is that used by the company and will determine who is awarded a bonus when the time comes, it is therefore in everyone's interest to understand and accept this definition. Paul's aim seems to be to bring about this change in Willem's understanding, so that he will no longer have cause for complaint. He wants to show Willem that the company is fair and has particular reasons for giving or withholding bonuses. Willem reluctantly provides the answer he knows is expected to Paul's question, knowing that this is the crux of Paul's argument and that it defeats his own complaint. He

speaks the answer quietly and rather sulkily in a low tone, leaving a pause before he responds to mark his reluctance. Paul uses Willem's answer to explain that bonuses are performance related and illustrates his point with two examples.

He chooses soccer, something he expects to be an interest shared by most of the people present, as his first example. This is a rapport building strategy, because he knows that soccer is particularly popular among black South Africans and is more likely to win the attention of his audience than, for example, a rugby or cricket story. He offers no explanation or introduction to this example, because he expects the frame to be shared by everyone. The example is followed by two questions which are issued as challenges to the group. 'Do you think they really gonna play to win?' The first question presupposes a negative answer by using *really* with emphasis on the first syllable to suggest that they couldn't or shouldn't really think so. The second question is not an exact repetition of the first, but the content is echoed (line 15). As Tannen (1993: 42) points out, "repetition can be an effective device in making 'the point' of a story" and the second question here focuses the listeners on the point of the story.

Paul then moves to another illustration of his point, this time in Xhosa (as summarised above). The switch to Xhosa is significant as it is a marked choice for a white speaker, particularly in a meeting where English is the *lingua franca* and unmarked choice. This may be a strategy of neutrality, or even solidarity, aimed to include all members of the Unity Forum more explicitly than continuing in English would do. Appel & Muysken's (1987) application of Jakobson's model of the functions of language to code-switching, provides the best characterisation of this switch as conative (or directive), i.e. listener-oriented. In addition to the language change, there is a change from linear explanatory style to undulatory story-telling style, showing some resemblance to the Xhosa *ntsomi* tradition, as I explain below.

Although Willem, who is not a Xhosa-speaker, raised this matter, Paul is now addressing himself to the group as a whole and making sure that the Xhosa-speakers in particular

understand his point or are swayed to his position. He seems skilled at the inclusive or accommodating use of language and uses similar techniques at other times. *Ntsomi* are formulaic Xhosa fables built around core-clichés. The performer, for it is a performance involving bold gesture, vocal dramatics and song, does not moralise overtly. Didactic, moral, philosophical comment is revealed rather than stated. The main feature of *ntsomi* which can be seen in Paul's tale is that of repetition. He uses a sing-song rhythm for the phrase 'every day every day *nik' inyama, nik' inyama, nik' inyama; every day nik' inyama*' ('give them meat'). "Repetition is the most obvious structural and aesthetic characteristic of the *ntsomi* performance, moving from the simple reiteration of words and phrases to a sophisticated repetition at the very basis of the structure of the *ntsomi*, which finds form in the expansible image" (Scheub 1975: 3). The images are expansible, patterned and parallel sets (Scheub 1975: 174).

It is also worth noting that Paul is controlling Willem's turns to a large extent. Willem is forced to provide certain replies and is given little room to make further contributions. Fairclough (1989) describes this as power in discourse, with one participant exercising power over others and over the discourse type or conventions. The only term of address used is Willem's first name. This type of usage is referred to as an involvement strategy by Scollon & Scollon (1995) and is often found in asymmetrical encounters. However, at the same time, "the speaker is asserting that he or she is closely connected to the hearer" (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 37) to reduce the asymmetry of the interaction. Paul's use of *we* to refer to the company, includes himself and seems to exclude the rest of the Unity Forum. There is a power message in this usage which adds to the asymmetry of using involvement strategies down, i.e. from superior to inferior. By contrast the use of negative politeness strategies would have softened the FTA, giving "the addressee an 'out', a face-saving line of escape, permitting him to feel that his response is not coerced" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70).

Extract 9

Joyce brought up the fact that the first pay Friday of the year had been moved and that no one had been notified. Paul apologises, explaining that Paytech had experienced technical difficulties and notified the company too late to allow them to contact all sites. The Unity Forum and employees found this to be a problem, murmurs of /yes/, /ja/, *is problem*.

Joseph (J) in particular found the situation disagreeable and makes this plain to the Unity Forum; Paul (P) accepts responsibility for the mistake:

J: It seem like .... Also it's not first time .... and uh.. it's happen the second time and also 1  
 if I still remember quite clearly a problem some... I can't remember but there was a  
 problem on the office also and the guys didn't.. they never get paid there were I think  
 200 (unclear) and all those things.. seems this thing is growing up bigger and bigger  
 and when we go back to the workforce and we explain these things all of a sudden 5  
 everything is changed no one notify us so that we can tell the workforce all of a  
 sudden everything's been changed .. they come to me, I just lift up my shoulders I  
 don't know nothing, I'll go and phone the office.. so at the end of the day the people  
 lose trust at me.. every time.. even if they stand there, they j..just say go and ask  
 Joseph, ag Joseph no.. he will lift up his shoulders, I don't trust him anymore and all 10  
 these things.. all I'm asking, I know there will be the problems.. certain problems are  
 still coming... all I'm asking, even any of you are at the office, just pick up the phone  
 and tell your guys, so that we can explain to the people so that they must [ expect  
 (unclear).... please

[/ja/

15

P: Point taken, I appreciate that.

Joseph is angry and takes an accusatory tone. He feels that because of the mistakes or negligence of others, he has lost face in front of workers whose respect is important to him. His reputation, his positive face has been threatened and he does not appreciate damage to his pride. His complaint is a counter-threat to the face of those who compromised his own positive face. Brown & Levinson (1987) base their theory of

politeness on the assumption that face is vulnerable and that participants rely on one another to co-operate in the maintenance of one another's face. "[N]ormally everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each others' face..." (1987: 61). As he airs his grievances, Joseph seems to calm down and remember the face needs of others, which causes him to start adding hedges to his complaint, inherently a face-threatening act, admitting that he understands that problems can arise, and asking simply to be notified about them in advance. The turn has metamorphosed from an attack to a request and ends politely with *please*. Although expressions such as *all I'm asking* and *just* are used to minimise the apparent size of the request, these along with *please* indicate that Joseph recognises the imposition he is making on the others (Brown & Levinson 1987).

Many members of the Unity Forum support Joseph, with murmurs of *ja*, in his criticism of the system, leaving Paul to defend himself. He does not retaliate, but accepts the FTA graciously. By remaining calm and accepting responsibility, he saves his own face, coming across as fair and reasonable. He also gives face to Joseph by thanking him for his comments, thus making them appear positive and constructive. Whether they were intended as such or not can be debated with reference to various parts of Joseph's contribution.

#### **5.5.4 Contestation or Disagreement**

There are several extracts analysed in this section (5.5) which illustrate instances of agreement and support. I have therefore chosen not to include a separate heading for those examples. However, the disagreement and contestation moves which take place are interesting because they challenge the consensus goals of the meetings and have to be creatively resolved. Some disagreement is a necessary ingredient in negotiation. Without it, there would be no need to work towards the creation of alternatives which suit both parties. Pienaar & Spoelstra (1991: 3) define negotiation as "a process of interaction between parties directed at reaching some form of agreement that will hold and that is

based upon common interests; with the purpose of resolving conflict, despite widely dividing differences...”. The following extracts will show how the Unity Forum reaches agreement, despite differing views.

### Extract 10

The Unity Forum aims for consensus, so when a member disagrees with what seems to be general opinion, the discussion must continue until that person is convinced or the group moves in a new direction. The third meeting I attended was chaired by Mike, as Sali was unable to be present. Mike had a very different style of chairing, playing a far more active role in turn controlling and explaining, and not acting as translator as Sali does. On one occasion Mike (M) felt that a certain matter had been sufficiently dealt with, he tried to close the topic, Paul (P) prevented this and gave Joyce (J) and Dennis (D) a chance to speak:

- M: So does everybody agree that we gonna work on that system? 1
- P: If Xolani doesn't agree, we need to discuss it further. Is there anyone that feels the same way as Xolani?
- J: Ja, I'm feeling the [ same way because the core team is the... 5
- D: [mmm
- J: the people who [ ... who
- P: [is the [ family
- J: [is the family, the people who work together... now when you start to retrench then people they think they are not uh they are family and nothing can [ touch them 10
- M: [Ja, but Sis' Joyce, they they they belong to the family but they don't work as a family.. Now the people that don't work as a family, that is the people we I would say we 'want to get rid of' [makes quotes with hands]
- D: [motions to speak, moves his hands, leans forward]
- M: You see Sis' Joyce, the people in the core team, because they belong to the family... 15  
when the family move... they just get dragged along with the family. They don't work

as a family. If the family move they move

Mike's attempt to cut the discussion short before everyone had agreed to a course of action was not tolerated. The group supported Paul's move to continue the debate to everyone's satisfaction. Dennis and Joyce both gestured in frustration when the topic seemed to be escaping them. Paul's reopening of the topic gives Joyce the chance to speak her mind and air her traditional values of family and ubuntu; Dennis continues to be frustrated for some before he gets a chance to speak.

Mike addresses Joyce as *Sis' Joyce*, a respectful address form which is used among friends. It shows respect without creating distance and may be used for older women, married women and peers. The black women I spoke to felt that the term was positive and liked being called *Sisi*. This usage fits in with Brown & Levinson's (1987) positive politeness and Scollon & Scollon's solidarity politeness (1995), which express group membership and a positive evaluation of the hearer. Mike has probably chosen this term to show his respect for Joyce who is older than he is and the only woman at the meeting. He may also be using it to bring himself closer to her by choosing a culturally appropriate form of address from a culture different from his own. Mike pauses after explaining his view and then resumes with a restatement when he sees that Joyce and Dennis do not seem entirely convinced by his argument. He cuts Dennis off although he clearly wants to speak because he feels that he needs to put his case more strongly. This violates the norms which govern the role of the Chair: he is supposed to ensure that those who wish to speak are given the floor. There is a great deal of repetition over his two turns emphasising the abuse of the *family* by those who do not *work* effectively. He proposes getting rid of such workers, but hedges this suggestion slightly by putting in inverted commas, implying that it is merely a figure of speech. This cue may not be perceived by Joyce and Dennis, or they do not consider it to be a sufficient softening of his proposal, so the argument continues.

Extract 11

The discussion around the impact of warnings on bonuses continued for some time; two earlier extracts dealt with this topic (extracts 5 and 8). After much debate Paul points out that a person's record and not their performance throughout the year will determine their bonus under such a system. He suggests that Site Managers should assess the workers on their sites before the annual bonus is paid and decide what each worker deserves. Unity Forum members had various problems with this approach, fearing discrimination and subjectivity. Jackson (J) explained his doubts about the proposal:

J: I don't know why we are talking about this now.. about the on site.. the supervisor 1  
 must looking performance.. I think there is a procedure: if.. the performance of the  
 guy is not well, the site manager must talk that guy and give a warning.. Let's talk  
 about the warnings about this, because the performance you can get a warning  
 from your performance.. So now that guy can't understand his performance is very 5  
 poor, now I sit down with management and the leading hand, say Sali, he must get  
 75%, but how?... Sali doesn't know that, but at the end of the year he just getting  
 75 % ... You see the warning Sali will know if the foreman is talk to him 'Sali  
 please try, your performance.. your performance is very weak.. Secondly Sali if you  
 do that again, I will give you a warning'. So that is a chance for.. for.. for 10  
 warnings... I don't think you can do that separate, I don't know why you want to  
 do that... So if we talking about the warnings and the bonus let's talk about the  
 warnings... because then weak performance, there's a warning for weak  
 performance.. If the site manager doesn't do that hard luck ...for them because if  
 you just do it separate, I'm not happy about that, because that guy can't understand 15  
 how.. 'my performance is very weak'. Always think he's a good guy but at the end  
 of the year he just see on his bonus 'why my bonus so low?' And he go to ask him;  
 say 'no you are poor performance'. 'But how? He didn't say nothing to me about  
 that'.. You see if there's a poor performance.. the warning... there is a warning so  
 you mustn't try jumping to the system... there is a system. So if we talking about 20  
 the warnings on this issue of bonus, let's try to talk on the warnings, that's all.

Jackson speaks out confidently, sure of support from other members of the Unity Forum and clear in his views. He adds no redress to his criticism of Paul's proposal; there are no hedges, no concessions, no apologies. There is a system which should be taken seriously and used for the purpose for which it is intended. He openly goes against Paul's proposal, using phrases such as *hard luck* and *there is a system* which suggest that Paul is meddling with a perfectly good system and trying to create a new system when there is already one in place which works. His cries of *but how?* sound angry and indignant. They are exclaimed rather than spoken in a high pitch, making the proposed system sound ridiculous and entirely unacceptable. He feels that it is unfair and leaves too much to the whims of site managers. He further contests the suggestion with the sentences 'I don't know why you want to do that' (line 11) and 'I don't think you can do that' (line 10), but here personal opinion is signalled by the use of the first person pronoun, making the attack less general. His conclusion, *that's all* is abrupt and final.

The sentiment gets Wilson's support in Xhosa. The code choice may be significant in that it indicates solidarity within the group and represents the majority of the workforce, who would in all likelihood share this view. However, Wilson rarely contributes and may not feel comfortable in English. Nonetheless, the fact that this topic draws him out is in itself noteworthy. The Chair takes over after Wilson's remarks and suggests moving towards a decision and allocating percentage deductions to each of the three warnings. It is agreed that bonus will be affected only by warnings. Cornelius checks in English and Xhosa that everyone is agreed that only warnings will be used to determine bonuses and records this in the minutes.

### Extract 12

The next extract also follows on from a lengthy discussion, part of which appeared in extracts 7 and 10. Paul now raises the problem of core team employees who have given ten years' service to the company and are no longer performing up to standard. How is

such a situation appropriately handled? Paul (P), Joyce (J) and Dennis (D) address the matter here:

P: The problem comes in sorry.. is that when you talking about a person with ten years' service.. and the person is not working well... now you need to be able to address that person, that's the problem.. [ ] How do you sort that person out? The only way you can sort him out is with warnings [ ,

[/ja/ 5

that's the only way.. retrenchment can't sort out that person... if he's got a final warning, we can then still look at that person, even if he's got ten years, we can still look at him [

J: [and then for that ten years you don't look why now because maybe before he works very well but now it's come to the ten years he's not good... we look that or we don't look that? 10

D: [gestures emphatically in agreement, nods and waves his hands]

P: No, we look at that, Joyce, we must look at that

D: [puts his hand up for a turn] I'm sorry it's like Joyce said, the guy working six years now he's 38 he can't be faster [gesturing quickly back and forth with his hands]... that time he was like Stuart now just running up and down he was still young but now the age now he's not running 15

As soon as he starts speaking, Paul realises that he has cut off Stanley's conclusion. He had interpreted the parallel construction *your skills will save you, LIFO will save you* as the end of Stanley's turn (preceding the extract), but a tag question was added to check that his point was clear. It was the tag question that Paul cut off when he started speaking in the short pause after Stanley's main point. He misread the contextualisation clues, interpreting the pause as a signal that the turn was over. Paul apologises when he realises his mistake and then continues without a pause, believing that it is too late and unnecessary to do any further repair. He describes a problem he anticipates and proposes a solution. The second half of this turn (lines 3 - 8) contains a fair amount of repetition,

making it clear that warnings are the only way a person with ten years' service can be considered for retrenchment and therefore essential to the solution. Joyce finds this disturbing, as loyalty, support and co-operation are important to her. She feels that an employee's performance over the years of service should be considered, not only a person's most recent performance. Her comment may also be motivated by her own advancing age and a fear of losing her job if age naturally slows her down. She feels that this would be unfair as she has served the company well for many years. Dennis vehemently agrees with her, signalling his agreement with nods and hand movements throughout her turn. Paul attempts to put Joyce at ease, but Dennis insists on speaking his mind and elaborating on the concern which has been expressed. He too is a traditional man and among the older members of the Unity Forum, and in all likelihood of the company. He requests a turn by putting his hand up and starts to speak as soon as there is a pause, apologising for simply taking a turn. He wholeheartedly gives his support to Joyce and offers an example of the kind of person who will suffer under the proposed system. This makes the matter far more personal and raises the possibility of important differences in cultural presuppositions.

#### **5.5.5 Criticising**

On occasion a member of the Unity Forum feels that another has not performed a task adequately or correctly and criticises his/ her execution of the task. This criticism should be constructive in this type of environment, but may still cause the hearer discomfort, especially because of the public nature of such an attack. Two examples are discussed below, the first a little harsher than the second.

#### Extract 13

In the first example, Mike inquires about the provident fund slips which are issued every year. Workers have asked why they have not yet received these, although the financial year ended a little over a month earlier. Mike (M) criticises Joseph (J) for his execution of his task with a little support from Dennis (D):

- M: Under labour relations the um provident committee.. what happened to the people's slips ... that they had to receive at the end of February? 1
- J: of March
- M: end [ of February, end of financial year
- D: [February [nodding] 5
- J: when we phone they said they gonna send it.. that was was March, beginning of March, they said they gonna send it
- M: It's April, that was the beginning of March, it's the beginning of April already, Mr... Joseph...
- J: [We still waiting... 10
- M: [It's been a month that we waited and nobody has phoned again
- J: We still waiting on them but then we have to push them, force [them...
- M: [I think you must phone them again and find out because the people are out there are [asking... 15
- J: [When are they when are they opening on Saturday, not this Saturday next Saturday
- M: Why are [ ...
- J: [No no no, what I'm just I'm trying to say I will phone them again today pressurising them then if the coming Saturday when they open then I will go there myself 20
- M: Sure.. thank you Mr... [
- J: [But I will phone them today, I will let everyone know what's.. what they say

Mike as Chair has the power to take a turn when he wishes to speak. Here he brings up a topic under labour relations which was not on the agenda, but which he has perhaps heard complaints about. He contextualises his question by placing it under the heading of 'Labour Relations' which is an accepted heading in Unity Forum meetings. Joseph counters the accusation implicit in the question by altering the date, and so making the delay shorter and more acceptable. However, Mike receives support from Dennis that the

slips were expected at the end of February. His initial excuse is invalidated, so Joseph is forced to give a fuller explanation for the delay. He begins by making it clear that he has done his duty by contacting the people responsible for producing the slips. This is a face-saving move, as it reduces the responsibility he bears for the problem and shifts it to others who are not present. Mike immediately counters this explanation by pointing out that a month has passed since he contacted them and more should have been done in the interim. The form of address used is very interesting. Mike seems to want to show respect to Joseph by addressing him as *Mr*; however, he does not know or cannot recall Joseph's surname, so the respectful gesture is ineffective and perhaps even insulting. This attempt at deference may be a redressive action in light of the FTA of harsh criticism which Joseph is undergoing. Negative politeness is oriented towards recognising the hearer's need for independence and freedom from imposition, so FTAs are redressed with apologies, deference, hedges and impersonalisation mechanisms. These are intended to respect the hearer and distance the speaker from the FTA, making it appear necessary rather than desired (Brown & Levinson 1987).

After Mike's turn, there is a pause. Each participant seems to be waiting for the other to make the next move. When they start talking, it happens simultaneously; Joseph to further his excuse, Mike to reiterate his dissatisfaction. Joseph is silenced first and waits to complete his sentence. He is clearly uncomfortable with the idea of pressurising others into action, knowing that this kind of face-threatening behaviour can be awkward for both parties. Before he has had much time to express this sentiment, Mike has interrupted to put forward the course of action he thinks is necessary. This statement is more specific and adds the pressure of the workforce to Mike's request. Joseph interrupts to clear up a detail for his next suggestion. He does not seem to want to tolerate any further attacks on his capabilities. Mike does not believe that this excuse will be any different from the others and interrupts again, but Joseph speaks over him, refusing to be silenced. He emphatically stops Mike's attempt at interruption with a repetition of the word *no*. He continues, expressing the difficulty he is having in obtaining a turn to get his point across in line 18. Then he makes his final proposal as to how he will address the problem. Mike seems

satisfied and thanks Joseph, again unable to recall his surname. Joseph interrupts before the absence of his surname becomes glaringly obvious, perhaps to save himself the embarrassment of being addressed as *Mr...* or to show that he too can interrupt if he so desires. He is in control at the end of the discussion.

#### Extract 14

The second example of criticism deals with the neatness and cleanliness of Mike's site. Paul evaluated the site as being unsatisfactory and tells the story to make an example of it for other sites. Paul (P), Joseph (J), Dennis (D) and Mike (M) participate in the discussion:

P: The one thing that happened on Mike's site, I'm telling you all, he won't mind but.. 1  
 we looked at the one place and we said there's a lot of plastic in that one area, you  
 must clean it out, and what the guys did they moved the plastic from that corner to  
 that corner [pointing to opposite corners of the room], they cleaned that corner but  
 they just made the other corner dirty... 5

/laughter/

When we say clean it out, we mean clean it out, put it away, make it neat and tidy,  
 make it sort organised

J: I know who did that, follow my eyes [looks at Dennis]

D: [waves his arms, shakes his head, leans back, puts his head in his hands] 10

M: You see Joseph, now Mike gets the blame!...

Paul has just explained a new five star rating system (the financial rewards for which were discussed in extract 4) which includes the assessment of record-keeping, Jika meetings, house-keeping on site in addition to the original safety check. Sites now have to be up to five star standard in a number of areas before receiving the five star award. In this extract Paul makes an example of Mike's site, pointing out his mistakes so that others can do better. His claim that Mike will not mind being used as an example is itself a hedge on the FTA of criticising Mike, serving as an apology and showing respect. He repeats the final

point to draw attention to the mistake that was made and thereby ensure that everyone understands that it should not happen again. The repetition has a humorous effect, further softening the FTA, but at the same time making the purpose of the story clear. The tale is greeted with laughter and heads shaking in disapproval. Paul adds a further clarification in line 7 after the laughter subsides, again repeating several words with the same meaning. This kind of repetition is not in keeping with his usual style, so it draws attention to the matter. Although he almost takes his reiterations to a ridiculous level, there is an underlying tone of seriousness which warns that the matter should be taken to heart. Joseph seems amused and claims to know who the culprit was. Smiling, he asks everyone to *follow my eyes* and looks straight at Dennis. The Unity Forum laugh heartily, apparently finding his conspiratorial style hilarious. Dennis' response draws further bursts of laughter as he waves his arms, shakes his head and finally leans back and puts his face in his hands, hiding from the mocking crowd. Part of his antics seem to be a performance, in keeping with the dramatic tone set by Joseph. How much face damage is done by this accusation is not clear. Mike supports Joseph, perhaps in an attempt to absolve himself of blame, perhaps simply joining in the light-heartedness of the moment.

This extract shows some of the casual joking that takes place in Unity Forum meetings. This type of behaviour would not be expected in most business meetings which are formal serious affairs, but is an accepted, even integral part of Unity Forum meetings. It relieves tension and affirms a group identity which makes working together easier and more pleasant. Although the meetings are three hours long, members seldom look bored and never seem too intimidated by the meeting atmosphere to speak their minds. I found the meetings interesting, not only from a sociolinguistic point of view, but also in terms of subjects raised and problems solved. The Unity Forum plays an important role in making company decisions and has many important issues to discuss, so there is never any shortage of material which is relevant to all members and therefore holds their attention.

## CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

At the outset of this research project, the aims were to identify problems in intercultural communication in a business in Cape Town and analyse the causes of these difficulties. I started with the assumption that every communicative interaction that takes place between people has the potential to go wrong. I talked to people from a range of organisations and visited several of their offices. Everyone had something to say about communication and the problems involved in communicating across cultures. Seldom did I hear anything about how wonderful it was to be part of the rainbow nation, with members from different cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic groups working together as equals. People seemed to experience the new diversity in their lives and especially their workplaces as stressful and difficult to handle. However, at Cape Town Construction I found a rare spirit of unity and community. Different groups were happy working side by side, communication flowed in every direction throughout the company, everyone had the chance to participate in making decisions and shaping the company and their future in it.

Once I discovered this remarkable organisation and they permitted me to wander their premises, the aim of investigating the intercultural communication at this company, became to determine whether or not it was successful. Many of the interactions in the Unity Forum meetings looked at first as though they might go wrong. For example Stanley's use of the term *maternity* leave to refer to himself and his male colleagues was greeted with laughter and corrected, but a misunderstanding could have arisen with members of the group talking at cross-purposes had it not been addressed. The most striking example was Willem's attempt to raise the connection between bonuses and warnings for discussion. The rest of the Unity Forum continued being uncertain of his meaning and intentions for an extended period before Ishmail cleared up the problem. Even then, the potential for failure had not been ruled out as Paul remained confused and could have been left with a faulty understanding of the problem. Fortunately the problem

was solved and the group was able to embark on a discussion which was clearly defined and comprehensible to everyone.

However, there were times where something did go wrong, although the occasions were rare. I will discuss these occasions here and point out changes which could be made.

Sensitivity to the preferences or practices of other cultures seems to be good, although Webb (personal communication: May 1998) mentioned an incident at a company braai when someone poured water from an empty beer bottle on the fire to extinguish the flames. This bothered the Muslims present as it contaminated the halaal meat. Such transgressions seem to be a result of ignorance and are easily rectified by consciousness-raising training. I do not think that serious cultural discrimination underlies the camaraderie at CTC and sincerely believe that the incident mentioned was an unwitting mistake.

The most serious problem I found was that some workers felt the Unity Forum did not ask them to contribute problems to be discussed in meetings. As a result they did not feel that the Unity Forum properly represented them as workers because it did not take their needs into account. They were also critical of the fact that discussions prior to Unity Forum meetings took place at head office, so even if workers were informed, they could not attend as they had to be on site. The connection between the Unity Forum and head office worried workers because they felt it was the result of too strong a link between the Unity Forum and management. One worker put his complaint as follows:

If they stand for us, the community which we appoint them to stand for us, so if they stand for us they can't go there to the head office to discuss what is going to be happening next meeting, and the workforce did nothing about that. They must have to stay with us, with the workforce all together. So we choose a one day on the weekend when we are not going to be work ( ) that's why we can't trust that Unity Forum.

This is a matter that needs to be urgently addressed, as mistrust of the Unity Forum undermines the work they do in an attempt to represent the workers. If the problem has arisen simply because the site workers were not informed or were misinformed, that in itself has to be corrected. The company's communication cannot be considered successful if it only works for certain members of the company.

In general participants in Unity Forum meetings, and perhaps by extension all members of Cape Town Construction, are aware of different ways of interpreting messages and take care to ensure that everyone involved in an interaction understands what it is about. This belief is supported by information obtained on site visits where workers claimed that people in the company try to make things easier for one another and accommodate one another's linguistic and cultural differences. They also felt that no member of the company was excluded from meetings or similar events because of their English ability: there is always someone who can translate or explain what is going on, so anyone can attend meetings and simply ask for translations, as they do in Unity Forum meetings by asking for a different television channel. Perhaps they have realised that language is an important resource which can create strength from diversity.

Acknowledging and accepting their multilingual and multicultural make-up, puts them in a better position than the competition who may in many cases be blinded by their troubles and diving headlong into short-term or easy solutions, such as offering safety training in only one language and ignoring the multilingualism in their companies (Hindle 1998; Heugh 1995). Instead of fighting the internal diversity of the company, CTC is celebrating it and using it to bind the company together into a strong and formidable unit.

Organisations can gain economically from acknowledging multilingualism because fewer mistakes are made and fewer safety accidents occur, as everyone knows what to do and how to operate relevant tools and machinery and what may pose a danger. Workers are also not afraid to ask questions and raise problems, so rework or damage is avoided in advance by preventing the problem. Companies can also benefit because workers feel valued, trusted, respected and give their loyalty and support to the company in return.

They are motivated to produce quality work and so assure that the company gains a good reputation and therefore new work, and so play a role in ensuring their own future employment.

The pleasant side effect of this strategy is that the members of the company feel human, appreciated, respected, taken seriously and want to give of their best in return. This makes for motivated workers who produce quality work on time and gain the company the reputation which puts it ahead of other construction firms in the country. As a result the company can take care of the workers and ensure that they have work (or at least try), which again reinforces the team or family spirit that prevails. This in turn makes the work environment so much more agreeable and the workers so much happier and more willing to work hard and well.

So does this mean the communication, particularly that among members of different cultural groups, is successful? Let us return briefly to the definitions of success in Chapter Four. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) defined success as “the accomplishment of an aim; a favourable outcome” or “a thing or person that turns out well”. Webb (personal communication: February 1999) believes success to be *balance*. Inkeles (cited in McClelland & Winter 1969) spoke of qualities necessary to access in a modern changing world. Among these were “a disposition to accept new ideas and try new methods” and “a readiness to express opinions”. Adaptability and flexibility were considered by Jackson (1993) to be essential to successful intercultural management. Koopman et al. (1987), Lessem (1989) and Deming (1982) emphasised the importance of concern for workers and creating an atmosphere of trust in order to attain success. Christie (1996), in a similar vein, stressed the relationship between management and employees, “a partnership between management and employees ... which acknowledges that co-operation is foremost when it comes to the sustainability of business”.

Many of these definitions can be applied to communication. If communication has accomplished its aim, it has been understood and correctly interpreted and appropriate

action has followed. Balanced communication relates to the relationship between managers and employees: both sides give and take, communication flows both up and down, action is expected from all parties, everyone is respected. This type of balance is based in the ubuntu philosophy, which strives to make the company like a village or a family to which all members equally belong, and where they feel at home. In such an environment people would trust one another and could communicate openly without fear; they would be willing to express their opinions and ask their questions. This would be successful communication: communication which not only gets things done, but which also makes people feel accepted and respected and safe.

Successful communication must fulfil several functions; instructions which are issued and obeyed constitute only one aspect of successful communication. Of Jakobson's (1960/1972) six functions of language, those to which I wish to draw attention here are the emotive or expressive function, the phatic function and the metalingual function. These are functions easily neglected in the workplace, because emotion is seen to have no place at work and there is little time for clarification, let alone chatting merely for the sake of making contact. However, these functions are important to people as they fulfil their interpersonal needs, helping them relax and feel at home in the work environment (The Psychologist 1992, 12 (1)). Asking questions and raising queries is essential as it helps ensure understanding and prevents potentially costly errors. As Halliday (1974: 48) points out, language is a "primary means of cultural transmission" and can build or reinforce cultural identity even in the workplace. Language can also be an effective tool for change, whether social or simply within the organisation (Agnihotri 1992).

The management at CTC has shown a willingness to go the extra mile for their staff. The literacy programme which was instituted in 1991 was carefully researched by an outside agency and designed to cater specifically to the needs of the workers at the company. A 'ready-made' literacy package could have been acquired, but management wanted something that was theoretically and practically sound, so they went out of their way to find it. Communication is well-planned and considerate: Unity Forum minutes are

distributed in both English and Xhosa; posters providing visual information about safety are displayed; models of buildings are made to make apparently inane tasks meaningful; meetings are conducted in a mix of languages to accommodate all members of the company, acknowledging that a monolingual policy would be dysfunctional in such a context. Bekker (1996: 92) comments on the use of Xhosa in meetings in Cape Town: "In meetings where most people ... have become accustomed to an easy Afrikaans/ English form of communication, the use of Xhosa language is increasingly being requested since Cape Town and the Western Cape are considered by many Xhosa-speakers as part of their hinterland." He explains that the Western Cape has gained a third provincial language over the last two decades, since Xhosa-speakers from the Eastern Cape began migrating toward work opportunities in the Cape Town metropolitan area in the 1980s (when influx control was scrapped). Xhosa is used freely in Unity Forum meetings and in some cases it is English that has to be requested.

The company's corporate culture adds to the climate of trust and belonging. Elements of the ubuntu philosophy can be seen in company practices such as employing family members of employees, looking for ways to keep old workers who have served the company well for many years, providing a bursary scheme for employees' children, sending Unity Forum representatives to staff funerals, maintaining an open door policy, aiming for consensus in meetings, encouraging a free flow of communication. Agnihotri (1992) suggests that South Africa take a lesson from India's "participatory methodology for negotiating conflicts" and this is exactly what CTC have done: they have instituted a participative process (see Webber 1997) so that all members of the company are involved in conflict resolution and management. As a result perhaps agreements are reached which would not have been management's decision, but better represent the needs or views of the company as a whole. Van der Merwe & Twigg (1997) believe that and conciliation based approach to dispute resolution should be founded on a principle of voluntarism and that the resolution should lie entirely in the hands of parties to the dispute. They stress that no decision should be imposed. The Unity Forum exists so that worker representatives can make decisions, instead of having management decisions imposed on workers.

Storti (1994: 45) cites an example rather similar to an extract from the data. The participants in his dialogue are Ms. Lewis (L) who is American and Mrs. Fermi (F) who is Italian. He aims to show how perceptions differ across cultures:

L: As you know, we've had many complaints about Mr. Barzini.

F: What kind of complaints?

L: He's very slow in his work and some of our people aren't getting paid promptly.

F: Yes. Mr Barzini's been with us a great many years; he's not as efficient as he used to be. His age is beginning to catch up with him.

L: So you agree?

F: Definitely. After so many years of dedicated service, we can't expect him to perform as he used to. We'll be hiring someone new.

L: That's good to know. But I feel bad for Mr. Barzini. How is he taking it?

F: Taking it?

L: Losing his job, I mean.

F: Oh, he's not losing his job.

Different cultural values which underlie this interaction. Ms. Lewis believes that production is the only reliable way to measure a worker's usefulness. Mrs. Fermi and her Italian compatriots seem to view things in a different way: loyalty, dedication, service and experience are all important in addition to productivity. Storti (1994: 65) further points out that Americans generally seem to be uncomfortable with intangibles because they cannot be quantified. Production can be objectively measured, so it becomes a standard performance evaluation criterion. "But how can we measure dedication or loyalty? And if we can't measure them, then how do we use them to judge our employees?"

These were moot questions at one of the Unity Forum meetings I attended. The appropriate way to handle a worker who has been with the company ten years and who is no longer performing up to standard, was discussed in extract 12. As in the interaction in Italy, two cultural groups had significantly divergent views on the matter. The one group

was represented by a white man in a management position, the other by a black man and woman working as wage earners. The white man's view seemed similar to the American's, focusing on productivity and efficiency: a worker who can no longer perform up to standard should be dismissed. The traditional black view believes in taking care of elders and respecting them and maintaining the family, not throwing out 'useless' members - they are the people who took care of you when you could not, they are old and wise and know the ways of the world and the stories of the ancestors. Loyalty and respect for age are important in many black cultures and firing an old person who has served the company with dedication for many years simply because of their age, goes very much against the grain. As a result of these conflicting opinions, the Unity Forum is in a position to make a decision which takes all cultures into account. Had management been left to make this decision, they would have acted on less information and perhaps lost the trust and respect of many of their workers because of ignorance.

At Cape Town Construction communication is given priority because it connects management with workers. Since people are the company's most important resource, management must ensure the well being of the people. This could not be done without talking to them, listening to their problems and their needs and trying to understand who they are and what motivates them. The kind of communication that can do all these things cannot be constrained by rigid rules of formality or concerns about company hierarchies. People in the company must be accessible and have access to one another and feel able to talk to anyone in the company if they need to. Communication also plays a major role in creating a culture which encourages free interaction because the news of one kind word or piece of advice spreads and makes people realise that they have the right to talk and to be heard.

The visual communication received the workers stamp of approval in site interviews. Workers felt that posters in particular were good for conveying messages to anyone, without their having to know anything about the situation. Models of buildings accompanied by good explanations make tasks clear and give workers a sense of purpose.

Affiliated to this is the independence workers gain from knowing what to do and not having to rely on others to constantly prompt and watch over them.

Members of the company are aware that they represent a range of cultures and views and allow for differences. However, this does not result in stereotypes of different groups, perhaps simply because workers on site interact closely with one another for long hours everyday and have no choice but to see more than a two-dimensional cardboard stereotype in the figure working next to them. Members of the company in general seem to be prepared to listen to anyone's opinion before judging it: a marked open-mindedness characterises the staff. In terms of Bennett's scale (1993), I would probably place members of the company in various stages of 'adaptation'. Bennett believes that culture is a process: one does not 'have' culture, but rather engages in it. When people reach the stage of intercultural sensitivity where they realise this, they can "temporarily behave or value in a way appropriate to a different culture" without feeling that the integrity of their own culture is threatened (Bennett 1993: 52). Empathy and pluralism are the two phases within adaptation. "Members of oppressed minority groups who maintain their own culture and who can also operate successfully in the dominant culture are pluralistic, since they demonstrate command of at least one alternative worldview" (ibid.: 56). Many workers at CTC seem to demonstrate this ability, while members of management seem able to "understand by imaging or comprehending the other's perspective" (ibid.: 53). This is characteristic of the empathy phase and is ethnorelative in that it requires a shift in frame of reference. Adaptation is the penultimate stage in the journey Bennett sketches to intercultural sensitivity. If my observations hold true for the company as a whole, CTC is on its way in to the new millennium on a good footing.

In light of the above discussion it should be clear that my conclusion is that the intercultural communication at Cape Town Construction is successful. I base this conclusion on interactions with workers and management, visits to sites and the head office, attendance at meetings and a close analysis of all data collected.

Features of the intercultural communication at CTC which make it the unifying network that it is, include visual methods of communication, focus on the individual rather than the stereotyped group, cultural awareness and sensitivity, openness to different views and opinions, willingness to make an effort to reach out to others, listening and responding appropriately to everyone who speaks to you, not being afraid to constructively criticise others in the interests of improved quality or group spirit, a sense of belonging within the company and an atmosphere of trust. And most importantly, treating all members of the organisation as human beings with needs, emotions and vulnerabilities, rather than cogs in a machine. People interact as colleagues and as friends in meetings and joke among themselves, affirming their group identity and making the unity of the company stronger. Everyone in the company has opportunities to voice their opinions and all views are respected.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

Allusions have been made at various points to possible future research projects. This section will serve to remind readers of the possibilities that await them in related fields. Firstly and most importantly, I would like to recommend that similar studies are done at other South African organisations to establish how business in the new South Africa is managing intercultural communication. Communication among cultures is a major issue in the country at present and any light that can be shed on the matter is sure to be well received. Related to this is the research of training methods to address the problems which are found in various companies. Creating awareness of cultural difference and developing sensitivity in members of long isolated groups may be a great deal more difficult than it sounds.

Students interested in social dialects may find the task of testing Chick's hypothesis about asynchrony among speakers of languages other than Afrikaans, Zulu and English. The hypothesis could also be tested in groups who speak the same language but whose cultural backgrounds differ, for example white and coloured speakers of Afrikaans. I mentioned in

Chapter Five that Chick's hypothesis still remains to be tested between coloured speakers of Afrikaans and speakers of English. It was not made clear whether his sample of Afrikaans speakers included coloureds, so it would interesting to see if the pattern holds for these speakers.

Finally, the changes caused in English by management gurus would make a fascinating study. Technology, globalisation, management trends and economic changes have created a need for new terminology and people in these fields have allowed their imaginations to run wild, coining words at every opportunity. Word processing packages which underline spelling errors and unrecognised words in text make the abundance of such new terms very clear. Is English actually changing or are these terms destined to remain a separate jargon?

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