

## **CHAPTER 2                    DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualise diversity in the workplace. This chapter represents step 1 of phase 1 of the research methodology. It starts off by defining the term ‘diversity’, after which a socio-historical context of diversity in South African is presented. This is followed by an exploration of the different approaches to diversity in the workplace. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **2.1        DEFINING DIVERSITY**

During the last few decades, diversity has become a corporate buzzword and a burning issue on the agenda of most companies (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Riccucci, 1997; Sadri & Tran, 2002). The different ways in which diversity has been viewed and defined since the 1980s has caused a great deal of confusion about the actual meaning of the concept (Rice, 1994; Wellner, 2000). The result is that diversity means different things, to different people, at different times (Susser & Patterson, 2001). The following subsections explore key areas relating to the phenomenon of diversity and works towards a definition of the concept as used in this research.

#### **2.1.1    Shifts in the way diversity is defined**

Historically, diversity was broadly defined as variety, or the existence of multiple versions of the thing in question (Leach et al, 1995; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996a). This broad view of diversity changed during the 1990s, with organisational strategies such as equal opportunities, employment equity and affirmative action creating the impression that diversity referred only to specific groups that were in some way different from the dominant group or that had in some way been disadvantaged (Arriola & Cole, 2001; Chmiel, 2000). During this era, the meaning of diversity was thus narrowed down to refer to specific minorities such as *blacks*, *females* or *gays* (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b).

During the latter part of the 1990s, organisations started to realise the benefits that diversity could offer the organisation. This realisation prompted a shift back to a broader and more inclusive view of diversity where everyone's difference is valued (Griggs & Louw, 1995; Lorbiecki, 2001; Thomas & Ely, 1996). In an effort to include rather than exclude employees, diversity was simply defined as "all the ways in which we differ" or a long list of differences was given that usually concluded with a phrase such as "...and all other individual differences" (Hayles & Russel, 1997, p. 13). These changes seem to indicate that diversity is not a static construct but a dynamic phenomenon that continuously evolves as society redefines itself.

### **2.1.2 Diversity as difference and similarity**

The terms used to describe diversity include *difference, unlikeness, variance, variety and distinctness* (Ashkanasy et al, 2002; Kandola & Fullerton, 1994; Lorbiecki, 2001). These terms imply a norm. Objects that are unlike the norm, are classified as different, distinct or as a variance of the norm. In this sense diversity indicates an exclusive nature that primarily focuses on 'out-groups' (Hayles & Russel, 1997). This notion of diversity is especially prevalent when organisations approach diversity from an assimilation or a 'right the wrongs' (see section 2.3) perspective.

The shift towards valuing difference brought with it the realisation that diversity cannot be defined only in terms of differences. Although there are dimensions that differentiate between people, there are also dimensions that are common denominators that bind people together (Ofori-Dankwa & Julian, 2002). The result is a more inclusive approach to diversity that does not focus only on differences, but also works with the similarities between people. From this stems the belief that the similarities between people make it possible for them to bridge their differences (Newell, 2002). The dual focus on similarities and differences requires the ability to assume both a micro-perspective that focuses on individual differences, as well as a macro-perspective that focuses on overarching similarities (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b).

### 2.1.3 Diversity as relational concept

Diversity by nature is a relational phenomenon (Patel, Bennet, Dennis, Dosanjh, Mahtani, Miller & Nadirshaw, 2000). It is only when an object is viewed in relation to other objects that differences and similarities come to the fore (Weiss, 2001). In essence, diversity is thus about the relational nature of people with all other people.

The relational nature of diversity can further be regarded as subjective since what is viewed as different or similar depends on the specific vantage point of an individual or group. Difference can, for instance, be defined as the attributes of 'others' or the 'not-me' attributes (Patel et al, 2000). The viewer's subjective frame of reference thus serves as the sole criterium for defining what is similar or different, normal or abnormal.

### 2.1.4 Dimensions of diversity

Loden (1996, p. 14) compares humans with "trees in a vast forest that come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors". Although people share important dimensions of humanness with all members of the species, there are biological and environmental differences that separate and distinguish people from one another. The dimensions which could be used to differentiate between people can be divided into *primary* and *secondary* dimensions of diversity (Wellner, 2000).

- *Primary dimensions* refer to characteristics that are inborn and/or exert a vital influence on early socialisation and have a powerful, sustained impact throughout every stage of a person's life (Ruderman et al, 1996; Wellner, 2000). Loden (1996) identifies age, ethnicity, gender, mental/physical ability, race and sexual orientation as primary dimensions of diversity. People are most often identified by their primary dimensions that are readily observable (Carrel, Elbert, Hatfield, Grobler, Marx & Van der Schyf, 1998).
- Beyond the primary dimensions, there are many *secondary dimensions* that play a key role in

shaping values, expectations and experiences (Ruderman et al, 1996). These include dimensions such as family status, educational background, geographic location, first language, religious beliefs and work experience (Leach et al, 1995; Wellner, 2000). Generally, secondary dimensions are more mutable, less visible to others, and more variable in the degree of influence they exert on a person's life (Loden, 1996). The power of these secondary dimensions is usually less constant than primary dimensions because they can be acquired, modified or discarded (Carrel et al, 1998).

While each of the above-mentioned dimensions adds a layer of complexity, it is the dynamic interaction between all the dimensions that produces the unique person - the synergistic, integrated whole (Loden, 1996). Together the primary and secondary dimensions help to mould the identity of the person.

### **2.1.5 The contextual nature of diversity**

The phenomenon of diversity is contextually bound within time and space (Sonn, 1996). Time refers to the historical context, while space refers to the physical location or country. From an ecological perspective the belief is that contextual factors impact powerfully on diversity and the way it is perceived, interpreted and acted upon (Bond & Pyle, 1998).

The history and past experiences of a society frame and inform the way in which that society relates to specific issues. The relative significance of specific differences and similarities in a society, for instance, largely depends on the historical context of that country (Braathen, Bøås & Sæther, 2000; Curry, 2000; Greenstein, 1998; Handelman, 2000; Steyn & Motshabi, 1996). A case in point is the significant role that race has played in South Africa (Bekker & Carlton, 1996; Sonn, 1996; Thompson, 2001), while religion has been the source of most of the strife in Northern Ireland and ethnicity/organic purity has been a matter of life or death in Rwanda (Strauss, 2001).

Chidester et al (1999) also emphasised the importance of taking the socio-historical context into consideration. The aim of this is not to stay stuck in the past or to keep on blaming everything on what

has happened, but rather to gain an understanding of the forces that have influenced and shaped the way a society perceives, interprets and acts towards similarity and difference. The patterns of racial division in the country can, for instance, only really be grasped if the brutal facts of slavery, discrimination, oppression and segregation are taken into consideration. In this regard Wachtel (2001, p. 657) stated that history influences a society in the way it generates a further history - "one that, all too often, bears a tragic resemblance to what came before". Past experiences thus set in motion patterns that become virtually self-perpetuating.

From the contextual nature of diversity, the notion is thus that to truly understand diversity and its behavioural dynamics, it must be studied in the context of time and space.

#### **2.1.6 Diversity as defined in this study**

With the above (subsections 2.1.1-2.1.4) as background, diversity is defined as *a relational phenomenon that focuses on the similarities and differences between people and the way that these similarities and differences are perceived, interpreted and acted upon. These similarities and differences are based on the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity. Applied to organisations, diversity thus refers to the primary as well as secondary dimensions that define each person, subgroup or group as an unique entity, and the way that the resultant similarities and differences between people, subgroups or groups are perceived, interpreted and acted upon. Diversity is a dynamic phenomenon that is contextually based within time and space and continuously changes as society transforms itself.*

Taking the contextual nature of diversity into account, the next section explores diversity in the South African context in more detail.

## **2.2 DIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

With the consideration of the importance of studying diversity in the context of time and space, this section explores diversity in the South African context. For the purpose of this research, a simplified historical account of diversity in the South African context will be presented. Chronologically it divides the country's history into three periods: (1) South Africa, pre-1994; (2) South Africa, post-1994; and (3) the South African dream. The overview thus presents a past, present and future perspective on diversity in the South African context.

### **2.2.1 South Africa: pre-1994**

Long before its 'discovery' by Europeans, the southern part of Africa was inhabited by ancestors of the Khoisan and Bantu speaking population (Thompson, 2001). These indigenous hunting and herding people remained isolated from the wider world until 1487 when Bartholomeu Dias's expedition first anchored on the shores of Southern Africa (Beck, 2000). A decade later, Vasco de Gama rounded the southern tip of Africa to sail to India. The strategic and profitable nature of this endeavour ensured that an increasing number of Portuguese, Dutch, English, French and Scandinavian mariners started to use this sea-route to Asia (Beck, 2000). From time to time these mariners landed at the Cape Peninsula to take in fresh water and barter for sheep and cattle from the local Khoi-Khoi (Thompson, 2001).

Modern South Africa began as a by-product of these enterprises when, in 1652, the Dutch East India Company founded a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope (Eades, 1999). The intention of the colony was solely to establish a halfway house between the Netherlands and its eastern empire. Despite this intention, the colony steadily grew as an increasing number of Dutch settlers and later the French Huguenots settled in the Cape (Beck, 2000). Large numbers of slaves were also imported from Madagascar, Indonesia, India and Ceylon (Thompson, 2001).

The arrival of the 'white invaders' can be seen as the starting point of South Africa's explosive history of domination, exploitation and intolerance towards difference (Beck, 2000). Although the relationship between the white settlers and the indigenous people was initially fairly cordial, tension soon developed as conflicts over land, cattle and rights intensified (Thompson, 2001). The continuous struggle for power

and survival with its accompanying domination, exploitation, and power relations became entrenched in South Africa's history (Beck, 2000; Handelman, 2000; Worden, 1995).

From 1652 to 1795 the Dutch used their power base to entrench and affirm their culture and language in the Cape colony. This changed in 1795 when a British expedition easily forced the Dutch officials into capitulation (Thompson, 2001). Although the Dutch regained the Cape under the terms of the Treaty of Amiens in 1803, they were ousted again in January 1806. From its colonisation by the British until the 1994 transition to majority rule, the country was dominated by a white minority (Beck, 2000). During this time the British Empire entrenched its culture and language in South African society (Eades, 1999). After the discovery of South Africa's mineral wealth (diamonds and gold) British interest in the country soared, and kick-started the exploitation of the country's riches (Worden, 1995).

After World War II, the power shifted from English-speaking Whites to the more conservative Afrikaners who had descended primarily from the Dutch settlers (Thompson, 2001). The National Party put various strategies and policies into place to empower and ensure the survival of the Afrikaner (Worden, 1995). The legal centrepiece of the South African racial policy, 'apartheid' (separateness) took in effect in 1948 and wove itself into every aspect of South African society within one generation (Eades, 1999). Apartheid rigidly segregated people on the basis of race and linked the allocation of rights, power and distribution of resources to these identities (Beck, 2000). Apartheid served as the foundation of a race-based society (Greenstein, 1998).

The apartheid regime ruthlessly exploited and discriminated against people of colour (Greenstein, 1998). In this research, the term 'people of colour' refers to black people, coloured people and Indian/Asian people. People of colour were denied fundamental legal and economic rights and received vastly inferior education (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). Black people were subjected to the greatest level of legal discrimination. Although coloured and Indian/Asian people had more legal rights than black people, they still ranked well below the white people of the country (Handelman, 2000).

Government policies of separate development (divide and rule) divided the country into separate educational, political, and housing systems. The purpose of the establishment of separate homelands

for black South African communities was to justify the exclusion of black people from participating in the central political system and to keep them out of the 'white cities' (Thompson, 2001). Up to the 1990s, South African history is fraught with examples of how the dominant groups (Dutch, British & Afrikaners) for their own gain, used their power base to enforce their culture, and exploit and discriminate against the minority groups (Beck, 2000; Greenstein, 1998).

Pre-1994 South Africans have been socialised in a society that promoted the idea of white, Afrikaner male dominance (Greenstein, 1998). In reality, a person's race and gender determined whether they were 'good enough'. The internalisation of these messages perpetuated the situation and often led to self-imposed oppression (Steyn, 1994). According to Sonn (1996), 'acting less than' white people actually became part of the survival strategy of people of colour.

By the late 1980s, apartheid and the domination of white people were under intense domestic and international pressure (Worden, 1995). Constant unrest in black townships coupled with international isolation and a worldwide trend towards democracy compounded the pressure for change (Handelman, 2000). Black people's reaction to the apartheid regime with its social, economic and political exclusion changed from acquiescence and negotiation to political and economic action, and they finally resorted to resistance, violent confrontations and the start of the armed struggle (Eades, 1999). During the latter part of the 1980s South Africa appeared to be poised on the edge of an abyss (Bekker & Carlton, 1996).

De Klerk's administration realised that apartheid was no longer a viable option and that they had to reconcile and negotiate while the white minority was still in a position of power (Worden, 1995). During 1990, a variety of segregation laws were gradually rescinded. At the same time, the primary Black opposition, the African National Congress (ANC) was legalised after decades of banishment (Beck, 2000). The ANC's legendary leader, Nelson Mandela, and hundreds of other political prisoners were released from different prisons, mainly the Robben Island maximum security prison for political prisoners (Eades, 1999). These changes, coupled with the ANC's suspension of the armed struggle opened up the doors for negotiations. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was tasked with negotiating a new political order (Handelman, 2000).

### **2.2.2 South Africa: post-1994**

The complex nature of South Africa's 1994 transition was eloquently captured by Beck and Linscott (1996) who likened South Africa to a crucible into which various disparate and volatile human elements such as people of different races, cultures, ethnic groups, religions, and languages were being poured. Beck and Linscott (1996) foresaw a new human amalgam coming from the fire, heat and pressure of the crucible.

The relative peaceful establishment of a new democratic government, especially against the backdrop of widespread expectations that the country would be plunged into inevitable black-white conflict has been regarded as a South African miracle (Hunt & Lascaris, 1998). In this process, President Mandela served as symbol of reconciliation and forgiveness; an activist for uniting the divides in the country and healing the wounds left by apartheid (Bekker & Carlton, 1996; Eades, 1999).

President Mandela's intent could clearly be seen in his inauguration speech. Mbigi (1998, p. 38) quotes the former President stating: "We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of millions of our people. We enter into the covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their inalienable right to human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world ."

President Mandela's vision for South Africa placed the country on a course towards the dream of becoming a 'rainbow nation'. Although the government committed itself to deal with diversity-related issues, and to tackle the remnants of the previous regime, the voyage has been far from smooth sailing (Bekker & Carlton, 1996). The government had to deal with the country's emotional baggage and the resistance to change. It also became clear that discrimination and prejudice would not easily disappear (Thomas, 1996).

Since 1994, the government has been initiating reforms to ensure that all individuals have an equal chance of being selected for employment and that they will be treated equally once hired (Thomas, 1996). Special emphasis has been placed on previously disadvantaged groups which include black people, coloured people, Indian/Asian people, disabled people and women. The government's legislation and policies created the guidelines for South Africa's transformation. The Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1997) embodied universally accepted fundamental rights and civil liberty, while the Employment Equity Act (South Africa, 2000) were put in place to create a more equal and discrimination-free workplace.

Post-1994 diversity and transformation were mainly dealt with on a behavioural level through the implementation of legislation and non-discriminatory policies (Bekker & Carlton, 1996). However, movement has however taken place on an affective level - the deeply held emotions and values about people of difference are still basically the same (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). Difficult diversity-related issues and emotions seems to be avoided or not dealt with. This leaves a strong emotional undertone of anger, frustration, resistance and guilt (Handelman, 2000).

Although it is important to deal with diversity-related issues on a rational level, the value of dealing with diversity on an emotional level cannot be underestimated (Carrel et al, 1998; Groenewald, 1996). This is specially relevant since the unspoken provision seemed to be that there would be no future without forgiveness, and there would be no forgiveness without repentance (Naude, 2001). This need to deal with the country's emotional legacy was partly addressed through the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). The TRC brought the atrocities of the past out into the open (Eades, 1999). It provided a forum where people could talk about their pain and sorrow, and also created a space where South Africans could reach out to each other in forgiveness. Symbolically, the TRC thus carried the burden of healing the country's emotional wounds.

Nevertheless the road towards a multiracial democracy in South Africa still remains difficult. Black people have discovered that majority rule does not guarantee improved living conditions (Handelman, 2000). Organisations are also still experiencing major difficulties in celebrating difference, with racial conflict as the primary focus area (Oakley-Smith & Winter, 2001).

### 2.2.3 The South African dream: a future perspective

The political and socio-economic changes that took place in South Africa during the 1990s propelled the country from an apartheid regime towards the dream of becoming a rainbow nation, where every person, regardless of race, colour or creed, could be valued and accepted (Beck & Linscott, 1996). The importance of bringing the country's people together is reflected by the motto of South Africa's new coat of arms '*!ke e: /xarra/ /ke*' which translated means 'unity in diversity'.

According to Hunt and Lascaris (1998), the South African dream refers to a society in which each citizen, regardless of gender, social position, race or disability has equal rights. On an organisational level it implies that the playing field must be consciously levelled through training, equal access to resources, and the removal of intolerance, prejudice and ignorance (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). The dream goes beyond narrow descriptions of vocational advancement and includes broader dimensions such as extended employee participation, economic empowerment, social investment, education and the general welfare of previously disadvantaged people (Richards, 2001). After the political liberation of 1994, the need for personal, economic and cultural liberation became more evident (Sonn, 1996).

In this dream, the importance of restoring and developing the dignity and confidence of people is not debatable (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). It challenges the traditional attitudes and values that view people as dispensable resources not worth investing in. The African philosophy of *ubuntu* ties closely to this theme. *Ubuntu*, which states 'I am because we are', emphasises the link between an individual and a group (Mbigi, 1998). It propagates the collective interdependence and solidarity of humanity, and embraces hospitality, caring for others and a willingness to go that extra mile for the sake of the other (Ramose, 2002). The primary belief is that a person's humanity is bound up in other people's humanity. When a person thus dehumanises someone else, he/she inescapably also dehumanises himself/herself. The South African dream cannot be achieved through quick-fix diversity-related solutions. Band-aids covering deeper, recurring problems will not work. Interventions must be based on the underlying attitudes and assumptions that are conducive to liberating the human spirit (Hunt & Lascaris, 1998), and should integrate the rational, emotional and behavioural components (Hayles & Russel, 1997).

Tokenism aimed at appeasing the conscience of the previously advantaged will simply result in short term change, without long-term growth (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994). Without a change of heart, transformation will only occur on a mechanistic level. It will lead to a situation where the more things change, the more they will stay the same.

To realise the South African dream, people will have to deal with the baggage, prejudice and stereotypes of the past which both directly and indirectly disrupt the way people relate to one another (Naude, 2001). On an individual level this entails accepting, valuing and embracing one's own uniqueness as well as the uniqueness of others. On an organisational level, the inequitable distribution of power, positions, knowledge and skills must be addressed. Organisations need to devise creative ways of integrating the diverse perspectives of its workforce and find ways to balance economics with social responsibility. The fundamental challenge is to create inclusive organisational citizenship where all members have something to offer (Mbigi, 1998). There must be empowerment and acceptance of responsibility.

The challenge of the new South Africa is to find one another through unity in diversity. During the previous dispensation, differences were exaggerated in order to separate and discriminate (Hunt & Lascaris, 1998). The myth was that the various ethnic groups are so different that it is impossible to live and work together in harmony. The essence of the rainbow nation lies in the interdependence of all South Africans. As Mbigi (1998, p. 36) puts it: "Each of us, need all of us ." It is about creating a culture in which everyone is included and valued regardless of race, gender, religion, language and other differences.

The South African dream of becoming a rainbow nation is still far from being realised. Various arguments can be formulated in both defending and attacking the probability of attaining this dream. The view that only time will tell what the result of the South African crucible will be (Beck & Linscott, 1996), seems to be an appropriate answer to whether the South African dream will be attained. Although there is a lot of dooming evidence, the dream spurs and directs the nation's efforts towards reconciliation and healing.

#### **2.2.4 Integration: diversity in context**

The historical perspective provided in this section indicates the dramatic impact that diversity-related forces have had on South African society. It indicates that diversity is not only a “here and now” occurrence but that it has had a long history that has influenced the way it is perceived, defined, interpreted and acted upon. To fully understand diversity in South African organisations, the contextual legacy and emotional baggage that frame the meaning of diversity must be understood. It emphasises the complexity of the problem that organisations face and also illustrates why mechanistic solutions to diversity-related problems are not adequate.

With the historical context in mind, the next section explores the different approaches that organisations use in dealing with diversity.

### **2.3 APPROACHES TO DEALING WITH DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Although diversity has always been a primary theme in the South African society, only in the last few decades has it really influenced the way organisations function. Before the 1980s the workplace was generally homogenic with little attention being focussed on addressing diversity-related issues (Kogod, 1991; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996a). The vast amount of socio-economic, political and technological changes that have taken place since then have resulted in a more heterogeneous workforce, with an increasing number of women, people of colour, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older workers, and people from different nationalities entering the labour market (Chmiel, 2000; Hostager & De Meuse, 2002). Since the 1980s diversity, with the added complexities it has brought to the workplace, have become a fact of life (Arredondo, 1996; Leach et al, 1995). The realisation has dawned that differences in the workplace lead to either crises or opportunities. Crises occur when differences cause conflict and block synergy, while opportunity abounds when differences are dealt with constructively to create synergy (Hayles & Russel, 1997).

In this regard, Newell (2002) points out that diversity can be a ‘double-edged sword’ that offers the

potential for both constructive and destructive outcomes. Although most experts argue that diversity would lead to better work relationships, less destructive conflict, more effective communication and more satisfied employees, the opposite is often true because diversity leads to destructive conflict, lower morale, less effective teams and more dissatisfaction (Chmiel, 2000; Newell, 2002). The way the organisation deals with its diversity largely determines whether its effect will be constructive or destructive.

According to the literature, diversity can lead to the following benefits if it is dealt with constructively (Carrel et al, 1998; Loden, 1996; Ofori-Dankwa & Julian, 2002; Richards, 2001; Roosevelt Thomas 1996b):

- It can reduce costs generated by high turnover and absenteeism.
- It can ease the burden of recruiting scarce labour.
- It can enable the organisation to tap into a range of skills it has never had. Women and minorities bring different perspectives and specialised knowledge about important markets and new ways of dealing with situations.
- It can reduce the conflict between diverse members/groups.
- It can enhance the creativity and problem-solving ability of the work teams.
- It can provide fresh perspectives on market penetration.

Another factor that influences the way organisations deal with diversity relates to the motivating force that propels or motivates an organisation to deal with diversity. From the literature, the following three broad motives can be identified for dealing with diversity:

- (1) *Legal requirements.* The legal requirement refers to the fact that when dealing with diversity, certain aspects are strongly advised or enforced by law or organisational policies. This includes legislation guiding nondiscriminatory practices in organisations, initiatives to redress the imbalances of the past, as well as legislation to stop further discrimination and to try to remedy past discrimination (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000; Newell, 2002; Sadri & Tran, 2002).

- (2) *Moral imperative.* Organisations that subscribe to this motive view diversity initiatives as morally and ethically the right thing to do. This motive links up to a high level of social responsibility and acknowledgment on the part of the organisation that something must be done to remedy the wrongful discrimination of the past. Organisations that are driven by this moral imperative, willingly incorporate diversity into their strategy, structure and corporate culture (Newell, 2002).
- (3) *Economic necessity.* Organisations motivated by the economic necessity point of view believe that diversity has the potential to be a major competitive weapon and can help the organisation to survive in a cut-throat economic environment. The business case of diversity is about how organisations can become more efficient and make more profit if they manage their diversity effectively (Carrel et al, 1998; Loden, 1996; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b).

The presence (or absence) of the above-mentioned motives influences the way organisations approach diversity. A review of diversity-related literature (Ashkanasy et al, 2002; Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Griggs & Louw, 1995; Lorbiecki, 2001; Palmer, 1989; Rieger & Blignaut, 1996; Thomas & Ely, 1996) indicates that there are certain basic approaches that organisations have implemented in dealing with diversity. The researcher identified assimilation, 'right the wrongs', valuing diversity and the management of diversity approaches as being relevant to the South African context. The following subsections explore these approaches in more detail.

### **2.3.1 Assimilation**

Assimilating minorities is one of the initial ways in which organisations have dealt with difference (Lorbiecki, 2001; Thomas & Ely, 1996). In organisations that subscribe to this approach, managers disregard differences and expect people to blend in or assimilate with the dominant culture (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). The values, norms and standards of the dominant culture serve as a guideline on interacting, with little leeway given for individual differences (Rieger & Blignaut, 1996). Assimilation assumes that the dominant group is superior. It devalues the diversity of the minority group and expects them to change in order to adapt to the accepted way of doing things (Carrel et al, 1998; Rieger &

Blignaut, 1996).

The assimilation approach thus focuses on the sameness of the dominant group and rejects the difference that minority groups bring to the table. Difference is seen as a threat rather than an opportunity (Leach et al, 1995). The assimilation approach devalues diversity and reinforces the value of homogeneity. In a culture such as this minority group members are acceptable only if they conform to the values, norms and standards of the dominant culture (Carrel et al, 1998; Eades, 1999). This leads to the phenomenon that minority groups often feel compelled to assimilating with the dominant culture. Members respond to this by either becoming angry and agitated or by withdrawing and isolating themselves from the larger group (Leach et al, 1995; Palmer, 1989).

The assimilation approach also leads to certain subtle and other more blatant forms of discrimination. Members of minority groups, for example, often suffer from resentment, stereotyping, prejudice, hostility, harassment, and discrimination at the hands of their co-workers (Greenstein, 1998). In the long run, this leads to a hostile working environment, with members either leaving the organisation or becoming uncommitted and withdrawing from it (Rieger & Blignaut, 1996; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

South Africa has a long history of dealing with diversity according to the assimilation approach. For approximately the past 60 years, South African organizations have been dominated by a white-Afrikaner-male culture with the Eurocentric paradigm guiding business practices (Handelman, 1994; Worden, 1995). The Afrikaner-dominated civil service is a good example of the above. Members who met the white-Afrikaner-male criteria were part of the in-group and reaped the benefits, while out-group members struggled to survive in these organisations (Sonn, 1996).

### **2.3.2 The 'right the wrongs' approach**

The 'right the wrongs' approach recognises the legitimate anger or isolation of specific groups in an organisation which, as in the larger society, have been systematically disadvantaged by the dominant culture (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Palmer, 1989). The groups that have been disadvantaged in this way

differ from culture to culture. In South Africa, the term 'previously disadvantaged' refers to black, coloured, and Indian/Asian people as well as to disabled people and women (Devenish, 1998).

According to Kogod (1991) the 'right the wrongs' approach tries to accommodate members of the disadvantaged group with special advantages to compensate for the barriers they face(d). Organizations that view diversity through this lens focus on employment equity, equal opportunities, affirmative action, the recruitment of previously disadvantaged individuals, as well as on compliance with legislation and antidiscrimination policies (Arriola & Cole, 2001; Chmiel, 2000; Riccucci, 1997; Ruderman et al, 1996).

Norris (1996) pointed out that although this approach to diversity does not normally change the organisation's mindset, it does have merit in that it paves the way for managing diversity by creating more representative organisations. Unfortunately, the implementation of these initiatives often negates the positive effect that it could have (Ashkanasy et al, 2002; Herholdt, 1999). In certain instances these strategies are implemented merely for window dressing purposes, or even worse, they are sometimes implemented in such a way that it sets people up for failure (Human, 1996a). Although legislation has in theory enforced a fair and equal working environment, in practice, the implementation of diversity initiatives still relies on the ethics of those in positions of power, such as managers (Ashkanasy et al, 2002). For instance, there is no evidence to suggest that homogeneity is often perpetuated in the workforce through managers recruiting in their own image.

It can be contended that the 'right the wrongs' approach is currently rife in most South African companies (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994; Laubscher, 2001). The historical overview (see section 2.2) outlined how the South African government, on a national level, enforced legislation to 'right the wrongs' of the past (Devenisch, 1998; Herholdt, 1999). On an organisational level, various anti-discriminatory programmes and policies have also been put in place to ensure a fair and nondiscriminatory environment (Oakley-Smith & Winter, 2001; Sonn, 1996; Van Dyk et al, 1992).

Diversity training according to this approach, is normally aimed at sensitising the dominant culture to the unique concerns of the disadvantaged groups (Laubscher, 2001; Richards, 2001; Steyn & Motshabi, 1996). Examples include programmes such as gender sensitivity workshops, racism campaigns, lectures

on sexual harassment, and information sessions sensitising members to physically disabled people. In this approach, diversity training is thus focused on making members aware of and helping them to understand antidiscrimination legislation and policies. These sessions, however, often stimulate resistance since they inevitably turn into ‘us-them’ arguments or debates (Button, 2001).

### **2.3.3 Valuing diversity**

Another approach to diversity is that of ‘valuing diversity’. Valuing diversity moves beyond assimilation and the ‘right the wrongs’ approach by appreciating and respecting people for their differences, and encouraging them to be conscious of and responsive to these differences (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996a). It entails moving from a negative or neutral view of diversity to acceptance and respect, and ultimately, to a positive view that values the difference of each person (Griggs & Louw, 1995). Valuing diversity works towards understanding the different cultural backdrops, stereotypes and prejudice that serve as pervasive factors in thinking about and behaving towards difference (Loden, 1996). The aim of valuing diversity is to create more positive intergroup relations by articulating the values of the organisation and offering diversity training programmes (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b).

According to Carnevale and Stone (1994), valuing diversity is receiver-centred rather than self-centred. It implies that people should be treated as *they* would like to be treated, rather than treating people as *you* would like to be treated yourself (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b). To truly value diversity, a person must first set aside his/her frame of reference before entering another person’s world. Valuing diversity recognises that one person’s standards and values are just as valid as those of the next person (Arredondo, 1996; Sadri & Tran, 2002). It moves away from the belief that people are all alike, to the belief that people are all unique. The potential of diverse groups is vested in these unique ‘gifts’ that each individual brings to the group.

Valuing diversity can thus be seen as a moral/ethical based approach to diversity that focuses on the affective and emotional (the heart) level. It mobilises values and moral arguments in favour of embracing diversity in the organisational setting.

The most widely used technique for valuing diversity is the implementation of diversity training programmes (Griggs & Louw, 1995; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b). Diversity training in this context is concerned with educative processes designed to promote inter-cultural learning that is, the acquisition of cognitive, affective and behavioural competencies associated with effective interaction across different groups (Phayane, 1998; Prasad et al, 1997).

Interpersonal effectiveness is the focal point of diversity training, and developing a diversity mindset is the desired outcome (Van der Westhuizen, 2001). Sonn (1997) explained a diversity mindset as an attitude of inclusivity of both similarities and differences. This appreciative attitude crystallises in empowerment and equalising behaviour that facilitates the erosion of prejudice and discrimination (McRae & Johnson, 1991; Phayane, 1998).

The goal of diversity training is to increase awareness and to work towards valuing racial, ethnic, cultural and other difference (Cavaleros et al, 2002; Meyer, 1999). These programmes are intended to make all members of an organisation feel valued and appreciated (Loden, 1996). Through didactic and interactive processes, diversity training examines concepts such as beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). A programme typically includes a mixture of lectures, discussions, videos, role-plays, experiential activities and simulation games. Some programmes also provide participants with relevant cultural and historic information in order to increase understanding and to work towards a diversity mindset. Other programmes provide participants with skills for interacting with members of other groups and for opening dialogue between groups (Loden, 1996).

#### **2.3.4 The managing of diversity**

The managing of diversity approach accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people and that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody will feel valued, where their talents will be fully utilised and in which organisational goals will be met (Newell, 2002). The managing of diversity can be defined as a planned systematic and comprehensive

managerial process for developing the organisational environment within which employees, with their similarities and differences, can contribute to the strategic and comprehensive advantage of the organisation (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Newell, 2002; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b; Thomas, 1996).

While valuing diversity is more focussed on addressing the feelings, attitudes and perception that people have of each other, the managing of diversity is more concerned with implementing various organisational initiatives and changing organisational structure, policies and practices in order to incorporate all members, and through this improve the organisation's efficiency (Ashkanasy et al, 2002; Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b). While valuing diversity is thus about changing the individual's mindset in order to increase awareness and sensitivity towards diversity-related issues, managing diversity focuses on changing the organisation to create an environment that accommodates and incorporates all employees (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Loden, 1996). The ultimate goal is to change institutions from the inside out so that they provide true equality and opportunity (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b).

The managing of diversity is based on the business imperative that aims to gain a competitive advantage by capitalising on the differences that people bring to the workplace (Thomas, 1996). Unlike equal opportunity or affirmative action initiatives, the managing of diversity is a long-term process that is inclusive and seeks to utilise the 'gifts' of all employees by reducing the barriers that prevent people from working together (Thomas & Ely, 1996). This approach works with difference, acknowledging diversity as an intrinsic part of the organisation (Newell, 2002).

The managing of diversity also involves the implementation of policies and practices that create negative sanctions against discriminatory behaviour. These sanctions enforce the organisation's commitment to diversity and make it clear that any person who undermines positive group relations will be punished (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000; Loden, 1996). Organisational factors relevant to the managing of diversity are the ethnic composition, representativeness, promotion and recruitment practices, standardised reward systems, grievance procedures and communication practices within and across the organisation (Sadri & Tran, 2002).

The basic premise of the managing of diversity is that efforts directed at changing individuals do not focus on the real need. The real need is to change the system by modifying the core culture (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996a). Hence this approach does not try to assimilate people into already existing organisational culture; instead, it tries to create a culture that accommodates people (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). The rationale or end goal of managing diversity can be linked to the business case of diversity - in other words that organisations will be economically more profitable if they can create an environment in which the uniqueness of all members can be used to bolster the organisation's functioning.

From the managing of diversity approach, diversity training is focused on integrating the gifts that difference brings to the organisation. In the context of organisational transformation, there is little room for a mindset that is defined by prejudice and discrimination. In order to embrace diversity and the value that it brings to an organisation, diversity has to be more than simply getting the heterogeneous factor right. It is imperative that organisations understand the collaborative possibilities that valuing and managing diversity bring (Selden & Selden, 2001).

The primary motive of the managing of diversity thus relates to the exploitation of the richness stemming from pooling diverse inputs and the resulting competitive advantages that it offers an organisation. From this perspective diversity thus becomes the difference that makes a difference.

### **2.3.5 Integration: approaches to diversity**

This section explored the different approaches that organisations used in the past and are still using in an effort to deal with diversity in the organisational context. From this overview it would seem that diversity is a dynamic field that continuously changes and redefines itself. These changes seem to be directly linked to the way society changes and redefines itself. The different approaches can thus be associated with the way a society has developed, as well as with the specific conditions that exist in it. To understand the approaches used in a specific society, knowledge about the contextual forces (national as well as on a broader scale) that have shaped that society, is of utmost importance. The implication is that South African society (like all other societies) will develop new strategies and approaches to diversity as it develops and as the contextual influences (nationally and internationally) change.

## **2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, diversity in the workplace was conceptualised. It started off by exploring key areas relating to diversity and worked towards a definition of the phenomenon. Next a socio-historical context of diversity in South Africa was presented. This was followed by an exploration of the different approaches used to deal with diversity in the workplace.

In chapter 3, the GRTM will be discussed.