A systems psychodynamic exploration of diversity management: the experiences of the client and the consultant

by Frans Cilliers[*]

Abstract

South Africa's diverse work force offers many challenges for employees as well as organisational development consultants. Since the first democratic election in 1994, organisations have implemented diversity management programmes with the object of building bridges between employees from different cultures and addressing conflict in the workplace. This study focused on diversity management programmes presented from a systems psychodynamic consulting stance, using group relations training methodology. The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the systems psychodynamic manifestations experienced during diversity management workshops as a microcosm of the organisation, as well as the experiences of the consultant to these workshops. Sixty-minute unstructured individual interviews were conducted with eleven consultants, who explored their experiences of employees' diversity issues as well as their experiences in their consultant role. Discourse analysis was done, applying the systems psychodynamic interpretive stance. The manifesting themes indicate how South African employees are obsessed with their split identity; how the anxiety around primary and secondary diversity dimensions is causing projection and projective identification, transference and countertransference, and how containment becomes difficult in organisations with high levels of anxiety around difference. Recommendations are offered towards optimising diversity consultations.

1 Introduction

Organisations have been challenged by diversity issues for many years (Cray & Mallory 1998). In the modern organisation, diversity phenomena have multiplied as a result of democratisation, globalisation and generational factors (Cross 2000; Holvino 2003; Maier 2002).

Democratisation refers to changes taking place because of human rights consciousness, and the pursuit of equal rights and representation in the economy (Thomas 2001). These include rights for women, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2005). The underlying dynamic is that the long-established male, heterosexual norms about aspects such as competitiveness, aggression, success, socialisation and work ethics are being challenged (Levine 2002). This challenge has an inherent potential for conflict and necessitates the development of a new work culture, based on different norms, values and assumptions. This

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dynamic is especially applicable to the South African diversity scenario (Booysen 2005; Human 2005; Pretorius 2003).

Secondly, globalisation refers to the stimulation of collaboration across boundaries between countries and continents. Organisations such as the EU, the OAU, NEPAD, NAFTA and GATT are trying to facilitate international trade and interdependence. Furthermore, the revolution in information technology and ways of communication is enabling multinational organisations to control their operations more closely and to correct deficiencies quickly, despite geographical boundaries (Cray & Mallory 1998). Thirdly, differences in value systems between generations of employees in organisations lead to confusion and conflict in the workplace because of a lack of understanding and empathy for others (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2005).

The business imperative for managing and embracing diversity lies in the improvement of relationships and business results. These results could be accomplished through the improvement of the following: the attraction and retention of talent (Human 2005; Kandola & Kandola 1995; Orey 1996); the quality of the relationships between different groups of workers (Kandola & Kandola 1995); the attachment to and detachment from the organisation by white males (Holvino 2003); team effectiveness (Thomas 1996); problem-solving, creativity and innovation (Cox & Blake 1991); performance standards (Kandola & Kandola 1995); sales through improved customer diversity and service (Cox & Beale 1997); competition in a global market (Human 2005); saving on costs caused by employee absenteeism and turnover (Cross 2000), and legislation that forces organisations to work towards a more representative workforce in an attempt to "get their numbers right" (as is the case in South Africa). From a human resources management and labour relations point of view, it is generally accepted that the improvement of the above aspects relates directly to how effectively the interpersonal and intergroup relationships are managed in the organisational system. According to Coetzee (2007), these relationships become more complex when and where diversity dimensions such as race, gender and generation enter the picture.

2   Defining diversity and related concepts

The literature on diversity is confusing because of the vast number of unintegrated definitions used (Thomas 2001). In practice, the confusion is enhanced by the view that diversity is a "mechanistic issue" that can be "put right" through training on the way different cultures experience life. This assumption denies the dynamic nature of diversity aspects and the continuous process of evolution that diversity undergoes as society redefines itself. Furthermore diversity is often confused with related concepts such as "diversity management", "valuing diversity", "multiculturalism", "affirmative action" and "employment equity" (Miller & Katz 2002).

Diversity is defined as the presence of people with subjective identities based on unique primary (inborn) and secondary (learnt) attributes, in one social system. These identities influence behaviour on the individual, group and organisational levels, leading people to behave in terms of power relations, subgroup affiliations and intergroup dynamics (see Arredondo 1996; Cox & Blake 1991; Griggs & Louw 1995; Holvino 2003). Diversity management is defined as the behavioural science research, theory and methods used to manage organisational change and stability processes, that support diversity in organisations and eliminate oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation and other human differences. Diversity management aims to improve

the health and effectiveness of the organisation, while affirming and valuing respect for human differences, social justice, participation, community, authenticity, compassion, pro-action and humility, effectiveness and health, and life-long learning (Cross 2000; Human 2005; Kandola & Kandola 1995; Thomas 1996, 2001).

Multiculturalism refers to an approach towards managing cultural diversity in a multi-ethnic society (or organisation) in which all citizens are seen as equal (Human 2005). Multiculturalism stresses mutual respect and tolerance for cultural differences, and it encourages cultural groups to preserve their cultures while they peacefully interact with each other. Multiculturalism can be seen as an opportunity for learning and reaching business objectives (Arredondo 1996). It is argued that an organisational culture characterised by the acceptance of the diversity of individual and group cultures facilitates feelings of security and self-confidence.

Affirmative action is a strategy to facilitate a work force that is diverse at every level, without unnatural advantage or disadvantage for any member within the diverse environment (Thomas 2001). A practical example is the following: assertiveness training presented to women can be seen as affirmative action, whereas the practice of making assertiveness training available to anyone who needs it, irrespective of their group membership, can be seen as managing diversity (Kandola & Kandola 1995). Employment equity is a strategy to facilitate a more representative work force, as reflected in the environment (state, province, country) (Cross 2000; Kandola & Kandola 1995). Ethno-centrism refers to the tendency to regard the own culture as better as or more correct than others (Reece & Brandt 1993).

Thus, diversity refers to any mixture of items characterised by differences and similarities (Thomas 1996) between individuals and groups that contribute to distinct social identities (Arredondo 1996) such as race, gender, ethnic or cultural background, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental capability, personality, social class, educational level, marital status, having children, living area, upbringing and work and job characteristics (Coetzee 2007; Griggs & Louw 1995). Diversity is not synonymous with differences but encompasses difference and similarities. In terms of organisational behaviour, diversity refers to every individual difference that affects a task or relationship (Thomas 1996). This means that diversity has an impact on the products and services developed by the workforce as well as on personal, interpersonal and organisational activities (Abdelsamad & Sauser 1992).

Reece and Brandt (1993) refer to the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity. The primary dimensions refer to core individual attributes that do not change, such as age, gender, race, physical appearance or traits and sexual orientation. These form the individual's self-image and his or her filters through which the world is seen and experienced. The assumption is that the greater the number of primary differences between people, the more difficult it is to establish trust and mutual respect. This leads to "culture clashes" which could have devastating effects on human relations in the organisation. The secondary dimensions are changeable and include communication style, education, relationship/marital/parental status, religious beliefs, work experience and income. These dimensions normally add complexity to the individual's self-image. The interaction between the primary and secondary dimensions shapes the individual's values, priorities and perceptions. The assumption is that effective human relations among diverse employees in the organisation are possible only when the differences are accepted and valued (Wheeler 1996).

3   The South African diversity challenge

On the macro level, globalisation and democratisation are the most important forces changing both the face of the workforce in South Africa and the customers it serves (De Jager, Cilliers & Veldsman 2004; Myburg 2006; Pretorius 2003). The complexity of globalisation is enhanced by Africanisation (Coetzee 2007). During Apartheid, the South African corporate world was almost exclusively Western in its focus, and disconnected from the rest of Africa. As from 1994, the government started building strong political and economic connections with neighbouring and mid-African states. The political democratisation has changed the workplace from a mainly homogenous (White male) to an increasingly multicultural and diverse work force. The fast-growing Black middle class has changed customer demographics and expectations, and consequently, the ways in which organisations do business.

On the micro level, specific diversity factors are influencing South African society, challenging organisations to merge differences into a corporate culture that is conducive to high performance by all the diverse sectors. These include the history and inherent diversity, ethnicity, religion, HIV/AIDS, the economy, governmental acts, social and organisational aspects (see Coetzee 2007).

Historically, the country is still experiencing many diverse and unresolved emotions from the Apartheid era, associated with racial segregation, minority domination and inhumane acts (Human 2005). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) acted as a facilitator that allowed the Black voice to be heard and helped Whites to get out of their state of denial (Asmal, Asmal & Roberts 1997). Yet, the diversity discourse is still marked by high levels of anger, hate and emotional baggage, which imprison citizens privately, as well as in the workplace (Cilliers & May 2002). Inherently, the country is seen as one of the most diverse countries in the world. The Blau heterogeneity index, which compares the degree of ethnic diversity between countries (1997-2000), found the South African diversity score to be 0,86, compared to 0,51 for the USA and 0,093 for Japan (Maier 2002).

In terms of ethnicity, the 2001 South African census (Statistics South Africa) showed the four major race groups to consist of Black (79%), White (9,6%), Coloured (8,9%), and Indian/Asian (2,5%). The Black group is heterogeneous and is made up of a variety of tribal subgroups, speaking nine of the 11 official languages. The White group is mostly English or Afrikaans speaking, with small communities of immigrants who speak other languages. The majority of coloured people speak Afrikaans and live in the "cape provinces". Most of the Asian population are English speaking Indians, although many also still retain the languages of their origins, and live in KwaZulu Natal. There is also a significant group of Chinese South Africans. In terms of religion, two-thirds of South Africans are Christian, mainly Protestant, including churches that combine Christianity with traditional African beliefs. Many non-Christians espouse traditional African beliefs and other significant religions are Islam, Hinduism and Judaism (Statistics South Africa).

The incidence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is one of the highest in the world. For example, the pandemic's rate among pregnant women increased from 0,8% in 1990 to 30,2% in 2005. Five and a half million people are living with HIV in South Africa. In the course of 2005 there were almost 1 000 AIDS deaths every day (Statistics South Africa). This situation is being aggravated by "AIDS denialism", a minority scientific movement that refutes the idea that HIV causes AIDS and that is supported by the present Minister of Health. Workers with HIV/AIDS are discriminated against, because

of fear of infection (Coetzee 2007). Therefore, AIDS education, the review of policies and procedures and the creation of an atmosphere of compassion in the workplace need to be part of managing diversity programmes.

In economic terms, the population displays extreme diversity in income, standards of living, level of urbanisation, health status, education, skills and life style (Statistics South Africa). The implementation of the Employment Equity Act (South Africa 1998) was aimed at promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination, implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, and ensuring their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the work force. The act and its pursuit of representation are interpreted as an attempt to "get the numbers right", with financial penalties in the event of failure. In practice it has been found that if the organisation cannot "get the cultures right" in the result is the cost of the so-called "revolving door syndrome" where a constant stream of diverse people are recruited, hired, oriented and trained. Unfortunately, owing to ongoing harassment and a lack of progressive development opportunities, they soon depart again (Cross 2000; Kandola & Kandola 1995). Although the intention of the Act is to enable equitable representation through the practices of Affirmative Action, progress in the management structures is slow and this is still the domain of males. Affirmative Action strategies in South Africa are challenged by the long history of entrenched racism. The transformation process of unlearning past and adopting new behaviours is difficult and strongly resisted, as is evident from criticism of reverse discrimination and token appointments (Cilliers & Stone 2005).

It is generally accepted that employees bring their "diversities" into their organisations (Cilliers 2004). These include social and cultural backgrounds, religious practices, rites of passage according to ethnic or religious roots, perceptions about politeness, social correctness, generosity and time, languages, dietary laws, dress codes and cultural taboos. Intolerance of the differences leads to discomfort, disrespect and strong feelings of racial fear, anger, resentment, conflict, competition, hurt, hopelessness and helplessness amongst employees (Cilliers & May 2002; Pretorius 2003). Furthermore, the new legislation on employment equity and affirmative action has brought a new kind of competition into the workplace, where emotional and economic survival appear tenuous.

Since the first democratic election in 1994, many large South African organisations have implemented diversity management programmes, designed around some of the above-mentioned diversity factors (Coetzee 2007). The programmes are mostly designed eclectically from many and mixed paradigms, using mechanistic "exercises" based on the assumption that diversity can be trained and the outcomes controlled. Research on such programmes has shown them to have no effect on diversity awareness (Cavaleros, Van Vuuren & Visser 2002).

Other such diversity programmes are presented from a systems psychodynamic consulting stance using group relations training methodology. According to this view, the programme and its workshops act as a microcosm of the organisational diversity dynamics. This means that the macro organisational diversity issues will play out in the micro workshop here-and-now events (Czander 1993). Research on the effect of such programmes points to a movement towards becoming aware of diversity issues on the conscious and unconscious systemic levels. The success of these programmes lies in their focus on the owning of projections onto and into "the other", authorising the subsystem to take up a leadership role, and to move from the paranoid-schizoid to the

depressive position (Cilliers & May 2002; Cilliers, Rothmann & Struwig 2004; Coetzee 2007; Myburg 2006).

The role and competence of the diversity consultant is crucial in the facilitation of the above-mentioned movement. This implies a high level of awareness of the consultant's own diversity representation "as an object" (see Klein 1997) and competence in working in the field of systems psychodynamics and the human relations training model (Hirshhorn 1997). On the other hand, the organisation needs to understand the model's assumptions and systemic, dynamic manner of working, so that clear predetermined training outcomes are not expected.

4   The systems psychodynamic perspective

The systems psychodynamic perspective originated at the Tavistock Institute in the UK (Miller 1993). It incorporates Freudian (1921) systemic psychoanalysis, the work of Klein (1997) on child and family psychology, Ferenczi on object relations and Bertalanffy on systems thinking (Colman & Bexton 1975; Colman & Geller 1985; De Board 1978; Gould, Stapley & Stein 2001). This perspective has been operationalised in many group relations working conferences for over 60 years (see Brunner, Nutkevitch & Sher 2006) all over the world. It has developed into an organisational theory (Miller 1976; 1983; 1993) as well as an organisational consultancy stance (Klein 2005; Neumann, Kellner & Dawson-Shepherd 1997).

The systems psychodynamic consultancy stance is based upon five basic assumptions as the cornerstones for studying relationships in systems (Hirschhorn 1993; Obholzer & Roberts 1994). These are dependency, fight/flight, pairing (Bion 1996; 2003), me-ness (Turquet 1985) and we-ness (Lawrence 1999). This stance offers a developmentally focused, psycho-educational process for the understanding of the deep and covert behaviour in the organisational system. Its primary task is formulated as pushing the boundaries of awareness to enable a better understanding of the deeper and covert meaning of organisational behaviour. This includes the challenges of management and leadership (Armstrong 2005; Lawrence 2000). This perspective engages in an analysis of the interrelationships of some or all of the following: boundaries, roles and role configurations, structure, organisational design, work culture and group processes (Neumann et al 1997). The consultant focuses on the covert and dynamic aspects of the organisation and the work group it comprises. He/she focuses on relatedness, representation and how authority is psychologically distributed, exercised and enacted overtly and covertly in the here-and-now, in contrast to how it is overtly and formally invested in the there-and-then of the system's official structure (Czander 1993; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle & Pooley 2004).

This perspective focuses on the following systemic behaviours: attitudes, beliefs, fantasies, conflicts, core anxieties, social defences, patterns of relationships and collaboration, and how these in turn may influence task performance. It also includes how unwanted feelings and experiences are split off and projected onto particular parts (individuals or groups who may have the valance for receiving and carrying the specific projections), that contain them on behalf of the system (their projective identifications and process roles as distinct from their formally sanctioned roles); and how work roles are taken up, especially leadership and followership (French & Vince 1999). In this context, Menzies (1993) emphasises the analysis of social defence aspects of structure and its relationship to task and process. The task is to understand how unconscious anxieties are reflected in organisational structures and design (which function as a

defence against them). This stance studies the system as a reality as well as "the system in the mind" in its totality (group-as-whole) (Wells 1980). This implies the dynamic movement from basic assumption group functioning and the paranoid-schizoid position towards interdependence, characterised by work group functioning and the depressive position (Czander 1993; Gould, Stapley & Stein 2001, 2004; Stapley 1996, 2006). The consultant offers the group his or her experience of the above in (1) a working hypothesis (a tentative reflection from a meta-position to serve as feedback to the system to stimulate further questions) and (2) an interpretation (a relay of what may be happening in the system based upon the above psychodynamic evidence) (Haslebo & Nielsen 2000; Schafer 2003).

Systems psychodynamic research on diversity has been presented and published internationally (Foster 2004; Levine 2002; McRae 2004; Nichols 2004; Skolnick & Green 2004) but without reference to the experiences of programme participants. In South Africa, Cilliers and May (2002), De Jager, Cilliers and Veldsman (2004) and Pretorius (2003) do refer to participants' experiences in such "working conferences" (or workshops), but the role of the consultant has not been investigated yet.

5   Research question and aim

The research question was formulated as follows: Taking the systems psychodynamic diversity workshops as a microcosm of the organisation's diversity dynamics, what diversity dynamics are manifesting in South African organisations at this time (13 years after the first democratic election), and what were the system psychodynamic experiences of the diversity consultants during the workshops in terms of the relationship between and the relatedness with the participants and the organisation. The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the systems psychodynamic behaviour manifesting during diversity management workshops as well as the experiences of the consultants to these workshops.

6   Research design

The research design was qualitative, using discourse analysis (Brewerton & Milward 2004; Camic, Rhodes & Yardley 2003).

6.1   *Research participants*

Purposive sampling (Brewerton & Millward 2004; De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport 2002; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004) was used. The following parameters were set to ensure the richness of the data. Participants were diversity consultants with an orientation towards systems psychodynamics (as described above – see Czander 1993) diversity consultants, working as internal or external consultants in two organisations in Gauteng (in the banking and chemical sectors), registered as psychologists or studying for a Master's degree in Psychology/Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Eleven consultants approached by the researcher agreed to participate in the project. The group consisted of males (5), females (6), Blacks (4), Whites (5), Coloureds (1) and Indians (1). Although the group did not reflect the South African diversity demographic scenario, it was accepted as "good-enough" (see Klein 1997) seeing that the sample contained participants from both genders and at least one of the four most numerous South African racial groups.

6.2 *The diversity management workshops*

The research participants acted as consultants in various three day in-house and six day open diversity events. The in-house events generally consisted of 30 hours of group work, and were attended by invited managers and employees in the organisation at break-away venues. The open event was the annual Robben Island Diversity Experience (see Cilliers & May 2002), which consists of 50 hours of (residential) group work. This venue was chosen for its significance as a symbol of (previously) denigration and (lately) freedom. It is attended by between 16 and 75 managers and employees from various large and small South African and international organisations, some of whom were change / transformation / diversity practitioners in their organisations.

All these events were similarly planned as group relations training events according to the Leicester model (Brunner et al 2006). The primary task was to provide opportunities for participants to study their own diversity dynamic behaviour as it happens in the here-and-now (Rugel & Meyer 1984). The structure consisted of two types of events, each with its own primary task, namely, here-and-now (plenaries, large, small, inter groups) and processing events (a lecture, review, application groups). During and after each workshop, the consultants met to process their own experiences and learning. This typically included the content of what the groups discussed and the dynamics of what the discussion represented in the South African context. Consultants also reflected on their own roles and what those represented for the groups and in the organisation.

6.3 *Data gathering*

The author conducted a sixty-minute unstructured, tape-recorded and transcribed individual interview (Brewerton & Millward 2004) with the eleven diversity consultants. Each interview began with the following question: Firstly, tell me about the diversity dynamics manifesting in the diversity workshops you consult to, and secondly, tell me about your own personal experience in your role as diversity consultant during these workshops." During the interview, Schafer's (2003:18) systems psychodynamic guidelines, which are based on "searching", were followed. This implies letting the interview flow and giving the interviewee the opportunity to access all possible experiences, to form free associations, to be curious about the research phenomenon, to move between different levels of abstraction in thought and to include feelings freely. Thus, conscious and unconscious behaviour could be accessed. On the other hand, direct questions were avoided, and no "correct and analytically useful answers" were expected (as they could disrupt the above-mentioned flow).

After the seventh interview, having "thoroughly explored the data and acquired a satisfactory sense of what is going on" (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006:372), the researcher became aware of saturation. In the spirit of diversity, it was then decided to continue with the eleven interviews, to include the above-mentioned "representative" sample.

6.4 *Data analysis*

Systems psychodynamic organisational behaviour can be analysed effectively with the aid of discourse analysis (Smit & Cilliers 2006). In this study, discourse analysis (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport 2002; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006; Van Manen 1990) was used to ascertain what discourses frame the language action, the way in which the participants make sense of

their reality and how this discourse was produced and maintained in the social context. The discourse markers related to the consultants' conceptions, values and beliefs about their behaviours and the social actions in their relationships with workshop participants.

The interpretation of the data was done through the application of the systems psychodynamic lens (Gould, Stapley & Stein 2001) within the context of organisational diversity. Thus, the researcher drew on his theoretical knowledge and subjective capacity to make sense of the social world in the diversity context. The method may be called systems psychodynamically informed discourse analysis (see Smit & Cilliers 2006) and entails the interpretation of the manifesting basic assumptions and relevant behavioural constructs.

The interpretations resulted in working hypotheses, which Terre Blanche et al (2002:342) describe as where "the data is sorted in a variety of ways, resulting in a variety of interpretations", after which the researcher selects the hypotheses that seem to best represent the constructions presented by the data sources. In this research the above description was extended to include Schafer's (2003) notion that the working hypothesis is a statement that is true for the time being and can be continuously reassessed in the light of further evidence. The underlying belief is that insight is an unending process. The working hypotheses formed the building blocks for naming the three themes.

The notion of trustworthiness was based on credibility and validity (Denzin 1989; Denzin & Lincoln 1994). It is believed that the study had strong boundaries in its in-depth (psychological) description which revealed the complexities of the variables and their interactions from a systemic and psychodynamic perspective. It is also believed that the enquiry yielded ethical and believable evidence. All interviews were conducted in a confidential manner in terms of the consultant's and workshop participant's identity. Furthermore, the interpretations were peer reviewed by asking two independent psychologists, to whom the theoretical model is well known, to investigate the dependability of the findings (which they found to be positive). One of the two psychologists asked about reflexivity, suggesting that the researcher's assessment of the diversity experiences may have led to a change in the situation. This had implications for ethicality (see Terre Blanche et al 2006). This psychologist also referred to the effect of the interviewer being a White male on cross-race and cross-gender issues. After an in-depth discussion, the findings were found free of disturbances in terms of reflexivity and cross diversity dimensions.

7 Findings

The emerging themes were, South African employees are obsessed with their split identity; the primary and secondary diversity dimensions are causing projection, projective identification, transference and counter transference; and containment becomes difficult in organisations with high levels of anxiety around difference.

Theme1. South African employees are obsessed with its split identity.

All the diversity consultants commented on the social, political and economic nature of the South African diversity scenario in which they work, which influences the diversity consultancy. It seems that employees and their organisations are obsessed with "who we are as a rainbow nation" (the term coined by Nelson Mandela), and "what I represent as a specific race, gender and age". The discourse highlighted the split

between the cultural subgroups of Black, White, Coloured and Indian in the manner described below.

Blacks are politically authorised for the first time in the 350 years of the country's documented history. Economically, there is a significant Black middle class developing while some are already being referred to as "super" rich. At the same time the majority of Blacks are still very poor and unemployed. The Apartheid racial discourse on the rich White and poor Blacks has recently changed to the class difference between the rich and the poor Blacks, with some reference to the emerging poor White group.

In government as well as large private organisations, Black males and females are officially authorised from above to take up leadership positions at the top of the organisational hierarchy. At the same time, they experience the organisational culture as being extremely competitive, not tolerant of negative feedback, and paranoid ("as if we are all being watched all the time in terms of what we do and how we perform"). They experience a lack of self-authorisation because of their limited collective background (history/memory) in managing and leading in a corporate environment. Individual employees experience high levels of anxiety about not being good enough, resulting in the revolving door syndrome. Some individuals reported taking up to three new top jobs per year and not settling down to even understand the job content sufficiently.

Older Black males are seen as the generation that fought the struggle and needs to be respected (and sometimes excused) for that. It is as if they represent stability after the struggle ("we have done our work"). The younger Black males are "empowered, because the new country belongs to us". This manifestation of one-ness is subverted by a strong element of interpersonal and inter-group ("tribal") competition. Some frame being African as only including Blacks, and excluding all Whites, some Coloureds and Indians. It is as if the younger Black men carry the hope for the country and the future development of their "in-group", and are at the same time putting new revolutionary "apartheid boundaries" in place.

The older Black females take up family and mothering roles. They experience continued oppression, "previously by the (White) government and presently still by our husbands". The younger Black females experience the same kind of "empowerment" as their male counterparts, but with more gusto and hostility. One young Black female expressed her sense of authorisation in a large group as follows: "if you stand in my way – it does not matter whether you are Black, or pink - I will just walk over you" (she was cheered by all in the group, some seemingly out of support and others out of fear). It is as if the younger Black female expresses the anger and need to break boundaries in the manner of a rebellious child.

Whites feel "politically disempowered", while economically still in charge in large organisations. The discourse among the Afrikaner subgroup refers to the loss of identity and leadership. Afrikaners seem to compensate for their loss by discussing the future of the language and culture in conferences and by attending Afrikaans music festivals all over the country, as well as in London, Sydney and Calgary. The English speaking subgroup are comparatively more silent, although they also experience and express confusion and fear.

Historically, White males were in power and kept busy with the management of the country and organisations. Thus, they had the least contact with other races, which could explain their present position. It is as if they are experiencing an inability to make contact with "the other". They feel de-authorised, are often not heard by others and seem to operate from the periphery (during the workshops as a microcosm of

organisational life). One participant stated that "we feel very depressed and it feels as if there is no future for Whites in the country". They also reported being pushed into offices at work which are out of reach of others, with the result that contact is difficult. They seem to represent the shame of the past.

White females have difficulty to adapt to "the new males coming into the organisation". Historically, they only had contact with "Black men as garden boys and Black females as house maids". Now, they work together as colleagues and need to build new relationships. This was interpreted by the consultant during the workshop as indicative of how citizens related to one another during Apartheid as objects (from an object relations point of view – see Klein 1997) and not as human beings (from a human relations point of view). White females are disillusioned towards White males and express their anger towards them for allowing the discrimination of the past. One such female stated that "White males sit with their big mouths in organisations and meetings, not responding in the moment. Only afterwards they have a lot to say about how their positions are taken and how disempowered they are". White females seem to represent a middle position between inclusion and exclusion.

Whites expressed a feeling that Blacks project guilt onto them, and some reported "taking in the guilt" (the dynamic process of projective identification). This implies a stuckness in diversity relationships, because one part of the diversity continuum holds the whole (in this case the guilt), which means that the other cannot access this behaviour. Both Blacks and Whites reported that their efforts to talk openly about past and Apartheid experiences lead to connection in across race relationships. Others feel anger towards the Apartheid government for the misinformation over decades, towards the majority of White South Africans who supported the National Party, and on account of the stagnation in the careers of especially White males as a result of affirmative action. Another subgroup (across age boundaries) denies its part in the past and claims innocence, which also makes connections with "the other" difficult. This illustrates the split position among Whites, especially Afrikaners, with a hopelessness sense "that we will never get away from the past".

Many Whites have left government positions "to make space for affirmative action and employment equity candidates". This has given rise to resentment and blaming. Some Whites have emigrated physically (to other countries) and others "have emigrated in the mind" (acting in a detached manner). Others have used self-authorisation to start new businesses, some successful and others unsuccessful. Most large cities have new poor White communities.

Coloureds and Indians find themselves "still in the middle" as if they carry the system's ambiguity, marginalisation, de-authorisation, silence, lack of acknowledgement, rejection as well as the envy for embodying both worlds – the Black and the White. One Indian female referred to being caught between tradition and the new demands to be powerful and part of the new dynamic. This new position also contains the pain of not belonging or being acceptable in the new dispensation. Another Indian female said, "from day one I was being told that I am not Black. I lived my whole life knowing that I am Black – will I ever be Black enough?"

Although it sounds as if the above splits are purely contained by subgroups, many individuals experience the opposites in themselves. They report feeling as if they "are sitting on the fence" which "is splitting us up completely". Sometimes Whites are called "kaffer-boeties" if they link up with Blacks and Blacks are called coconuts (black outside and white inside) if they act "to white". The system seems intolerant of allowing opposites to link and it protects parts of the self "to stay pure".

This discourse seems to be about how the new dispensation has changed everything for everyone. The accompanying awareness about the new identity is driven actively by the media across the political spectrum. There are websites on topics such as what it means to be an Afrikaner today, the role of the Black middle class male, and what is happening with mixed race marriages (which were not allowed under Apartheid). The daily press refers to "how fortunate we are that there was no bloody revolution in 1994" and "how unfortunate we are that violence, poverty and illness are rampant and influencing everyone daily". The president and government deny the severity of the situation, and specifically the aspects of violence, the causes and effect of HIV/AIDS, the situation in neighbouring Zimbabwe and the uncontrolled inflow of its citizens with the resultant xenophobia. The government is defended as "being new at managing and leading a country" and we are told that "everyone should be grateful that the economy is booming and providing opportunities for many to prosper".

It is hypothesised that South Africans carry and nurture experiences ("baggage") from history which hamper interpersonal and inter-group relationships and connection across differences. At the same time the system realises that the past "cannot be swept under the carpet - we have to deal with it". Some participants referred to the TRC's being disbanded too soon, "before the real issues were addressed".

The country as a system is setting up defences against its pain by denying the nature and the depth of the differences and its intense underlying feelings. The rationalisation is that "we can not do anything about the issues, so let's just move on". It also compensates by working extremely hard "to get it right no matter what it costs". It is hypothesised that the high level of anxiety and strong defences are indicative of the country's split position, where any investigation in an open and honest manner becomes filled with unbearable anxiety. When opportunities for investigation are offered (such as in the above diversity management programmes) it is as if some of the pain gets released, but in a chaotic and confusing manner.

It is hypothesised that the country finds itself in a state of adolescence (the new democracy is now 13 years old). This adolescent nation is experiencing the "Sturm und Drang" of identity forming where boundaries are tested and a lack of self-confidence and authorisation prevails (see De Jager et al 2003; Stapley 2006). At the work group level (according to Bion 1996), the system finds itself being authorised in and respected for its positive political and economic role in Africa, its representation of hope for the world for its reparation efforts, and for having a constitution that fosters human rights for all. The country is also recognised for its flourishing economy and as a tourist venue. At the basic assumption group level, the system finds itself in a state of counterdependence, with a split identity, unclear boundaries and a lack of self-authorisation.

Theme 2. The anxiety surrounding the primary and secondary diversity dimensions leads to projection, projective identification, transference and countertransference between participants and consultants.

During diversity management workshops, the consultant's performance and sense of competence are influenced by the organisation's diversity issues. The above split dynamics between the races and genders lead to projections of sameness onto the consultant, who then identifies with the projections in terms of their object relationship. The following examples serve as evidence for this proposition.

A Black female consultant reported that the fight between Blacks and Whites in the workshops made her realise that she "felt sympathy with the Black clients in the fight

against the Whites". This is interpreted as the client's projecting its issues onto and into the consultant, who contains the unwanted behaviour and unconsciously does the work on the client's behalf. Another consultant mentioned that she became extremely tired during the diversity workshops. Later, during a consultant processing event, she became aware of how she had been told during her youth that she "had to work very hard to get to the top and not allow White people to take her opportunities away from her". This is interpreted as the individual consultant's valence for competition "with the other" in the diversity sense being used by the client to act out the organisational competition issues between Blacks and Whites. A similar experience by a Coloured female was that she found herself in competition with her White female colleagues, because she needed to prove that she was "as good as they are". This is interpreted as the client's projecting their performance anxiety onto and into the consultant in order to avoid the ugliness of competing in a situation filled with the anxiety of working across differences. Another Black female consultant reported how she had been taught that Whites are the oppressors who did not trust Blacks, and therefore she should not trust them in return. On the one hand, she had to concentrate hard to avoid seeing the White workshop participants as oppressors, and on the other hand she had to guard against "taking in the projections of the oppressed one". Another referred to her conflict as a result of being a Black female with the accompanying cultural expectations versus being a diversity consultant "having to be objective and respectful towards everyone".

A Black male reported on how he was brought up to believe that the White male is the superior employer with power and money, while the Black male is the inferior employee. He became aware of how he plays into this dynamic and how he consequently "sucks up to the better White male consultant". A White male consultant who regularly works with Black consultants referred to the irritation he felt about "how the Black consultants are over dependent on me and struggle to take up their roles in an authorised manner". He experiences a conflict between wanting to help the "previously disadvantaged Black person" versus a sense of enjoyment arising from being honoured as the expert. A White female reported on "carrying both the White and the Black" when she was called "mother Africa" by the group. This made her the object of envy among her Black female colleagues, which complicated these collegial relationships.

The following are examples of how the secondary diversity dimensions manifested in the experiences of the consultants. Group members frame consultants from similar social identity (race, gender, class, background, education) as their in-group (similar findings were reported by Booysen 2005). Their dependency needs in terms of acceptance, support and understanding are then projected onto the "similar consultant", who can very often not resist the identification with the "strong seductive pull". The Black consultants get projections from Black participants about "our suffering is not over yet, you must listen and help us", while White consultants get projections from White participants about "we are disempowered, we need to get our power back and you must help us". This transference from the groups is experienced by most consultants on the cognitive level as "necessary for the sake of the learning". On the other hand, their counter-transference makes the situation difficult on the emotional level. One consultant described this as "I can understand their issues so well – I have been there so often, and it is tearing me apart - I just want to tell them to hold on and keep the hope alive." Participants in the consultant's out-group experienced strong "push dynamics" described as "a lack of words, insight, understanding and competence when the Blacks take the floor and wash my Afrikaner face in the dirt". When the

consultant interprets the group's diversity dynamics which are interpreted by his or her in-group as favouring the out-group, he or she is treated with anger and seen as a traitor. Most consultants reported that they had to work very hard in the subsequent consultant processing events to understand what they were containing on behalf of the split system, while also realising the importance of the trust inherent in the projection, to carry the burden on behalf of the system (see Bion 1996:2003).

It is hypothesised that the anxiety around primary diversity dimensions (such as race and gender) and secondary dimensions (such as social identity) is projected by workshop participants onto and into diversity consultants to carry on their behalf. The group's transferences are so recent and familiar to the consultant and at the same time so emotionally strong that the consultant finds it difficult not to identify with the projection, not to be seduced out of the consultancy role boundary, working on the primary task, and not to "become just another confused citizen".

Theme 3. Containment is difficult in organisations with high levels of anxiety around difference.

Five consultants reported on their "tremendous level of insight in the role of diversity consultant" and on what they had learned about organisational diversity dynamics. At the same time, all the consultants mentioned the difficulty in the consulting role in terms of the containment of projections onto and into them by the clients and the transferences towards them. Clients cope with the anxiety associated with differences between them as people by splitting off the parts of themselves that they do not want to own or understand. These are then unconsciously projected into the consultant as a container in the form of hostility, such as blaming. Inexperienced and vulnerable consultants experience the projection as an attack on their competence and ability to cope with the diversity situation.

Consultants reported how they experienced that their ability "to cope with the diversity anxiety" on the physical, intellectual, emotional and social levels "was sometimes under attack", to the point where they experienced intense incompetence and flight reactions. One participant referred to how she often felt the need to leave the workshop room as if the system was pushing her out of her role and into anti-task behaviour.

Consultants reported on their paradoxical experience of carrying the split for the groups as being "seen as good and bad at the same time". As the container of the good, the consultant is expected to play into the hands of the in-group, while as the container of the bad, he or she is expected to embody the very strong negative feelings. An example of these feelings is the anger associated with the past and the frustration of "being stuck" because the transformation is not moving fast enough.

It is hypothesised that systems psychodynamics/group relations training as a diversity management consulting stance allows the organisation to study the strong and intense emotions around diversity. These include frustration, anger, rage, hate, hostility, aggression, competition, rivalry, jealousy, envy, stuckness and lack of control. Miller (1976:1993) mentioned that these "difficult feelings" are part of this consulting stance, and that they complicate the containment of boundaries and make leadership difficult if not impossible. It is hypothesised that the nature of the work predicts that the consultant as the representative of leadership has to take on "the impossible task" which many participants referred to, filled with mistrust and distrust (as mentioned by Huffington et al 2004).

Consultants reported on how the diversity consultancy mirrors the diversity anxiety in their organisations. It is hypothesised that the level of diversity anxiety in an organisation, manifesting in stereotypes, prejudiced attitudes, ethnocentrism and discrimination, serves as an indication of how the diversity consultants will have to deal with strong projections and transferences around the split between good and bad, as well as with an experienced incompetence in the role. Although all consultants at group relations training events experience some of these dynamics (Brunner et al 2006), it is hypothesised that the diversity consultant's role is more prone to being split between good and bad, with its accompanying projections and transferences, because of the high levels of collective anxiety.

8   Final discussion and recommendations

This study investigated some of the business imperatives for managing and embracing diversity. Although it did not address macro aspects such as organisational performance standards, sales, service delivery, cost savings or global market competitiveness, it did address some of the human resources aspects, such as how the organisation is dealing with difference in talent, how relationships between individuals and groups are managed where anxiety is inflated because of observable and sometimes unmentionable differences, how a system is dealing with one element of diversity (such as the White male) versus the others, how diversity issues may negatively influence team behaviour and effectiveness, and the role of the consultant in facilitating awareness around diversity dynamics.

The findings suggested that if legislation to "get the numbers right" is implemented without "efforts to get the culture and climate right", interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup relationships will suffer. Diversity consultation from the systems psychodynamic stance offers insight into behaviour "below the surface" (Huffington et al 2004), which is challenging to the organisation as well as the consultant. It is recommended that these efforts continue in this country, to enable it to understand its troubled past and hopeful future. Evidence of how these two extremes are manifesting concurrently is reflected in the way the brutal death of pop star Lucky Dube was nationally mourned, while in the same week South Africa's victory in the World Rugby Cup was nationally celebrated.

The transferability and confirmability of the findings are difficult to establish, because no comparable South African or international studies were found. The only relevant study was the study by Hupkens (in Brunner et al 2006), which reported on participants' experiences in group relations conferences. These findings concerned leadership and authority, which fall outside the scope of this research.

The recommendation made to South African organisations is that in order to gain an understanding of diversity and its manifestations from the boardroom to the shop floor, it is necessary to explore the systems psychodynamics as they unfold in the here-and-now of any event, such as a meeting, a training event, a team building event or an informal luncheon. If the organisation can gain the resilience to explore its own behaviour as it happens, true learning about diversity may be happening.

Some of the participants mentioned that diversity consultation is not to be taken lightly ("it is not for the faint hearted", "diversity work is not for sissies"). Apart from rigorous training, it is suggested that diversity consultants require insight into using the self as an instrument in the here-and-now and offering one's awareness to the client in the face of hostility and rejection, where there is a strong emotional pull towards

experiencing the behaviour as personal. The recommendation made to systems psychodynamic diversity consultants is that they should always implement specific containment events before, during and after sessions and workshops. For example, this may be a review type group event, where non-workshop-participating consultant colleagues (or systems psychodynamically informed coaches) will be present to take up the role of consultant, providing opportunities for the workshop consultants to process their readiness before and experiences during and after the consulting event. This will enable the workshop consultants to counter the almost traumatised state consultants find themselves in on the collective level.

Although the present research on the nature of the diverse South African identity shows progress towards some integration of previously split parts, a lot more needs to be done towards understanding the subjective experience of the diversity client as well as consulting to diversity as a phenomenon. Organisations need to accept their responsibility in this regard not only as a consumer of research outcomes, but also as a system contributing to the national knowledge base.

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