

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

South Africa, pre 1994 has for a very long time been isolated from the world economy, due to their discriminatory laws and apartheid policies. The employment trend in South Africa was dominated by Whites, specifically White males.

The first free democratic election process, during 1994, saw the overwhelming majority of citizens vote for the ANC and a change to political rule in South Africa for the first time since 1948. The transition was a change from an apartheid government to a government of democracy, with a constitutional framework — the Constitution of 1996 — to encapsulate certain rights and embrace “One Law for One Nation”.

The new democratically elected government, which acceded to power as a result of an overwhelming Black majority, “inherited a society marked by deep social and economic inequalities, as well as serious racial, political and social divisions” (White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, 1995).

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995) (White Paper hereafter) points out that representativeness is one of the main foundations of a non-racist, non-sexist and democratic society, and as such one of the key principles, drives and proponents of the democratically elected government of South Africa. The White Paper (1995) emphasises that Black people (Africans, Coloureds and Asians) were excluded from all positions of influence in the state and civil society and that women were similarly disadvantaged, particularly those from the Black communities. People with disabilities, irrespective of race or gender, were seldom found in any positions of influence in the state or civil society (White Paper, 1995). These points made in the White Paper (1995) will later be tied to proposed enactments leading up to the promulgation of employment equity legislation.

The Constitution was only a preamble to the new democratic process. Many Acts have been passed in Parliament since 1994, but the Acts that affect the lives and professions of human resources practitioners most closely are those that seek to redress inequitable practices and processes which were discriminatory. A specific

act, the Employment Equity Act, No 55 (1998), is having a profound impact on the daily operation of human resources practice and procedure.

This first part of this thesis, namely the first variable, will briefly highlight the historical facts that led to the numerous social imbalances in South African society. One piece of legislation, namely the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998), has been the catalyst for the turning point, to embrace diversity within organisations in South Africa. The preamble to the Act, namely the Employment Equity Act No 55, (1998), recognises that as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory societal practices, there has been disparities in equal employment opportunities for all race groups, and that these will not simply disappear by repealing laws that were discriminatory. Thus the catalyst, employment equity processes have therefore been implemented to redress the effects of discrimination.

The second part will concentrate on the second variable of the thesis, namely gender and gender equity. The focus on gender is of particular interest, as the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998) concentrates on marginalised groupings and gender. The survey on employment equity and gender equity was conducted after the implementation of the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998). This study will show that more and more women are being employed in the working world and that the traditional role of women as home nurturers is slowly being eroded. (McCormick & Ilgen, 1986).

The organisation in which the study was conducted is a parastatal company that employs just over 500 employees. It is traditionally White male dominated, and the main focus of the business is technological communication systems. The company has 16 branches in South Africa, and the technological components of the business are well defined, very advanced and on par with international standards.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Over the decades human behaviour has been influenced by gender socialisation. "Gender socialization — teaching and learning lessons about the behaviours that are considered socially appropriate and desirable for either gender — can enhance or modify biological influences as well as foster gender differences by itself. ... In line with that, are gender stereotypes. A stereotype is a generalisation that distinguishes one category of people from another. A gender stereotype is a generalisation that

sets one gender apart from the other. Gender stereotypes may be accurate reflections of general behaviour (e.g., women are better interpersonal communicators than men; men interrupt more than women do), but as generalisations they may also simplify to an inaccurate degree. Gender stereotypes may also be based less in reality than in myth or tradition” (Weber 1992, p. 106). Gender stereotypes are thus typifications of behaviour that is attributed to males or females which may be real or may be based on perceptions.

Another aspect that “deprives both men and women of the emotional and financial satisfactions of work when their choices are limited by illogical stereotypes, is that of gender typing. ... Gender typing involves categorising things and people as masculine and feminine: it happens automatically (with little conscious thought and attention)” (Weber 1992, p. 106-107). Gender typing has obvious consequences for education and professional advancement. Men may be discouraged from pursuing careers in nursing and teaching. Women may not aspire to male-dominated professions although there is no reason why they cannot become distinguished high court judges or shuttle astronauts. Gender typing can thus affect career choices, depriving men and women of a career choice to match their choice and ability, merely because society places pressure on choices that are dictated by illogical stereotypes (Weber, 1992, p. 107).

The Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998) contains an embodied praxis which is contrary to the Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution, and in some aspects contrary to equitable employment practice. Will a spin-off of the implementation of the Act be reverse discrimination?

The Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998) has been the catalyst for South African organisations to review employment and organisational practices. Will the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998) enable organisations to become more gender focussed and gender sensitive? Will the process of gender representativeness become a prominent feature in the South African business context, or are we only paying lip service to gender equity? This study will try to answer questions such as these.

### **1.2.1 Research question**

Will the implementation of legal processes, namely the Employment Equity Act No 55, (1998), lead to gender equity? In other words, will sensitisation of minority groupings, with specific emphasis placed on gender, lead employers and fellow male employees to respect the rights, abilities and emancipation of the female gender?

## **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

### **1.3.1 General aim of the study**

The general aim of the research is to establish whether there is a different perception or mindset in the minds of employees within the organisation studied, on the process of employment equity, post implementation of the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998).

The aim of the study is to ascertain whether concepts such as racism and discrimination are still prevalent in the organisation being studied after the implementation of the Employment Equity Forum. This is of particular interest with regard to gender sensitivity and diversity.

### **1.3.2 Specific aims of the study**

In terms of the literature review the specific aims are to:

- Understand the sociological and historical factors that underlie the discriminatory processes in South African society.
- Gain perspective from specific models that underpin the literature of this thesis.
- Provide a historical overview of the evolving paradigms in the build-up to the promulgation of employment equity legislation.

- Understand the preamble to the legislative framework leading to the enactment of employment equity legislation, namely the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998).
- Understand the concepts and requirements of racism, discrimination, affirmative action and cultural diversity.
- Explain the concept of gender equity and equality and to review literature on the working female.

In terms of the empirical study the specific aims are to:

- Measure the attitude of employees in the designated company to employment equity in an effort to understand and determine employees' sentiments towards woman employees.
- Determine whether the implementation of the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998) laid a foundation for promoting gender equity and consequently for embracing cultural diversity.
- To compile conclusions, recommendations and future research-oriented thrusts on the topic.

#### **1.4 THE PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

“The purpose of the paradigmatic perspective is to provide the context in the field of industrial psychology in which the research is being conducted” (Mouton & Marais, 1994).

This study is undertaken in the context of Industrial Psychology, which is conceptually described as “the scientific study of human behaviour and psychological conditions in the work-related aspect of life and the application of knowledge towards the minimisation of problems in this context” (McCormick & Ilgen, 1986).

Within this context the subdiscipline is Organisational Psychology. Ivanchevich and Matteson (1996, p. 9) describes Organisational Psychology as “the study of human

behaviour, attitudes, and performance within an organisational setting; drawing on theory, methods, and principles from such disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology to learn about individual perceptions, values, learning capacities, and actions while working in groups and within the total organisation; analysing the external environment's effect on the organisation and its resources, missions, objectives and strategies".

Thematically the literature review concerns employment equity, with the following subcomponents: racism, discrimination, affirmative action, cultural diversity and gender equity.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study the dependent variable is employment equity and the independent variable is gender equity.

The literature review is presented in a qualitative, descriptive way; the empirical review is presented in an investigative manner using a statistical quantitative research method.

In this current research, internal validity at a contextual level is ensured by using definitions, models and a measuring instrument selected for the specific purpose of measuring the variables in a representative manner, and of presenting them in a standardised manner. External validity is ensured as the results of the survey could be applied to the larger population. The sample is the experimentally accessible population, namely the employees who were willing to fill in the questionnaire (Christensen, 1994, p. 546).

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHOD**

The research was conducted in two phases, each phase consisting of a number of steps:

### **Phase 1 Literature review**

Step 1 Historical overview of development paradigms in the South African context.

- Step 2           Against this historical backdrop, the introduction of employment equity legislation provides the catalyst for organisations in South Africa to review their employment equity processes. Incorporated in this process are the sub-variables of discrimination, racism, affirmative action and cultural diversity that impact upon the process of employment equity policy and practice. How organisations view these variables will affect the process of employment equity in practice.
- Step 3           A brief historical overview of the background and build-up to the enactment of the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998). The effects of this legislation are detailed and the advantages and disadvantages of this legislation for South African organisations are tabled. The input of the relevant stakeholders' position on this legislation is described.
- Step 4           South African population demographics relative to statistics on female representivity within the economically active workforce are briefly explained.
- Step 5           Feminist psychology and gender issues in the working environment are discussed.
- Step 6           A diversity model as presented in the literature review is discussed, and a model is proposed with specific reference to enhancing gender equity.

**Phase 2           Empirical study**

- Step 1           Description of population and sample.  
The total body of employees in the parastatal organisation in the communications sector constitutes the population. The sample consists of the employees who completed the questionnaire.
- Step 2           The choice of a relevant employment equity questionnaire, incorporating gender questions, is described.

- Step 3            Data gathering.  
Questionnaires were distributed to the entire population of the organisation. A random sample was not selected, as it was felt that this should be a voluntary exercise, and employees should be free to fill in the questionnaire if they wanted to.
- Step 4            Data analysis.  
The software package SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Scientists) was used to analyse the data. The data was analysed initially by the derivation of the scales by means of factor analysis. This yielded eigenvalues of the factor solution. Eight statistically meaningful factors were used in the interpretation of the statistics gathered. The following statistics were used to analyse the data:
- Mean and frequency distribution
  - T-test
  - Two-way analysis of variance
  - One-way analysis of variance
- Step 5            Reporting and interpretation of the empirical results.  
The quantitative results are reported by tabular presentation. The results are interpreted to determine employees' views on employment equity within the organisation after the formation of a Diversity Forum, with specific reference to male and female viewpoints.
- Step 6            Integration of the literature review and the empirical research.  
Results of the empirical study are integrated with the findings of the literature review.
- Step 7            Conclusions of the research.  
The conclusions are related to the stated aims of the research study. These are compared and conclusions are drawn.
- Step 8            Limitations of the research.  
The limitations of the research are formulated with reference to the literature review and the empirical study.



Step 9            Recommendations.  
Recommendations are formulated as a result of the findings in the empirical study and the literature review. Recommendations relate to making gender issues in the organisation more integrative and more representative. An employment equity model focussing on gender equity is presented.

## **1.7            CHAPTER DIVISION**

### **Phase 1**

Chapter 2        Historical and sociological overview of development paradigms in South Africa:  
Sub-variables comprising components of employment equity, namely racism, discrimination and affirmative action.

Chapter 3        Employment equity:  
Feedback from the Employment Equity Registry October 2000; and cultural diversity, a component and consequence of employment equity.

Chapter 4        Women in the working world:  
The experiences with regard to gender equity.

Chapter 5        Statistics employed and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 6        Research results.

Chapter 7        Conclusions, limitations, recommendations and chapter summary.  
Transformational model incorporating the systems paradigm: integrating the sub-variables of employment equity.

## **1.8            CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This introductory chapter has set the foundation of the study. The background to the research, problem statement, aims of the research, paradigm perspectives, research design, research method and chapter division have all been discussed. Chapter 2 will

give an historical overview of paradigms in South Africa that shaped the macro environment of the country and led to the discriminatory practices in the working world. A model of domination will follow, which essentially encapsulates the standpoint of the various paradigms. Racism, discrimination and affirmative action will be discussed as these concepts form the core component of the Employment Equity Act No 55 (1998).