

# EMPLOYMENT EQUITY PRACTICES IN THREE SOUTH AFRICAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATIONS. A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

This research explored the systems psychodynamic behaviour manifesting in the context of employment equity practices within three South African information technology organisations. In-depth interviews with the human resources practitioners involved, elicited seven themes around fantasies of power/opportunities, splits and defences, projective identification, paranoia, idealisation/competence, envy/guilt and coping styles. It was hypothesised that the experience around employment equity in these organisations got stuck in the paranoid-schizoid position, that the system was unconsciously colluding to keep the status quo, and that idealisation was projected on the white subgroup while denigration was projected on previously disadvantaged employees and candidates. Recommendations for more optimal coping with these behaviours were formulated.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing het die sistemies psigodinamiese gedrag ondersoek wat gemanifesteer het in die konteks van gelyke indiensneming in drie Suid-Afrikaanse inligtingstechnologie organisasies. Indiepte onderhoude met die betrokke menslike hulpbron praktisyns het sewe temas na vore gebring wat insluit fantasieë oor mag/geleenthede, spleet en verdedigings, projektiewe identifikasie, paranoia, idealisering/kompetensie, afguns/skuld en coping style. Die hipotese is geformuleer dat die ervaring rondom gelyke indiensneming in hierdie organisasies vasgehak het in die paranoïde-skisoïde posisie, dat die stelsel onbewustelik saamsweer om die status quo te handhaaf, en dat idealisering geprojekteer word op die wit subgroep terwyl swartsmeedery geprojekteer word op die voorheen benadeelde werknemers en kandidate. Aanbevelings oor meer optimale coping met hierdie gedrag is geformuleer.

Seven years after the introduction of the Employment Equity Act (no 66) (1998), evidence exists in many South African organisations of a constructive movement towards the implementation of employment equity programmes (EEPs), the empowerment of the previously disadvantaged workforce, the embracing and valuing of diversity, and the active development of a work environment beneficial to all employees (Oakley-Smith & Winter, 2001; Vinassa, 2001; Wentzel, 2002). Unfortunately, many of these organisational endeavours are not scientifically documented, monitored or measured. The existing South African literature (for example Booyesen, Nkomo & Beaty, 2002; Human, 2001; Jordaan, 2002; Laubsher, 2001; Mayakana, 2002), report on such programmes in vague terms, sometimes referring to its design and nature, but hardly ever to the quality of the interpersonal and intergroup relationships and behavioural dynamics within the employment equity (EE) realm.

Diversity programmes are presented in many South African organisations (Cavaleros, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2002; Lätti, 2001a; 2001b). The content of these focusses on awareness, discriminatory behaviour, its implications and the management of diversity (Diamante, Reid & Giglio, 1995; Thomas, 1994) and racism (Oakley-Smith & Winter, 2001), and some contribute towards more effective work relationships. Other such programmes are presented from a mechanistic 'training' stance, which do not seem to add value. Carnevale and Kogod (1996), Cavaleros et al. (2002) and Cilliers and May (2002) have confirmed that training alone cannot ensure the continued valuing and managing of workplace diversity.

The primary aim of the EE Act (no 66) (1998) and the government's efforts are to correct inequalities in numbers in South African organisations and to facilitate a more representative workforce according to the current demographics. On the obvious, overt, rational, conscious and

mechanistic levels, EE is about 'getting the numbers right' which could easily be done if all South African organisations simply train and employ the 'right people'. However, this does not happen easily, because on the covert, irrational, unconscious and dynamic levels, the system is defending against the change by means of especially resistance and exclusion. This seems to be happening specifically in the South African information and technology industry (Sake-Rapport, 2004, 7), where "IT announced another vague black charter" with no empowerment targets or clear role boundaries. Although work sessions are experienced as positive, "the black front disappears as soon as the contract is settled".

This research project argued that the actual reasons for EEPs not being effective, may originate from much deeper behavioural experiences and unprocessed negative feelings in the workplace as a system. No research within the South African EE context could be traced exploring these deeper psychological reasons.

Within industrial and organisational psychology and human resources management, the traditional views of studying organisational behaviour, such as the behaviouristic, humanistic and socio-cognitive (Cascio, 1997), focus on covert and conscious behaviour. When applied as organisational change approaches, they show an appreciation and sensitivity towards cultural and racial differences, which breaks down the insularity, enrich experience through interaction with 'the other' and confront the reality of difference (Elmuti, 1993; Hayles & Russel, 1997). On the other hand, they do not address the core problem of diversity-related change behaviour, such as the in-depth, covert, unconscious, systems psychodynamics between oppressor and oppressed (Canham, 2000; Chessick, 2000; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Krantz, 2001).

This research attempted to explore these specific interpersonal and intergroup behaviours in trying to add to the knowledge about the experiences around EEPs. The research was done in the IT industry since the press (Sake-Rapport, 2004) referred to this industry's struggle in handling EE, diversity and black

empowerment. The aim of this research was to explore the systems psychodynamic behaviour manifesting in the realm of EE practices within three South African information technology (IT) organisations.

### The systems psychodynamic perspective

The conceptual origins of the systems psycho-dynamic perspective stems from classic psychoanalysis (Freud, 1921), group relations theory and open systems theory (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Hirschhorn, 1993; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The central tenet of the systems psychodynamic perspective is contained in the conjunction of its two terms (Miller & Rice, 1976; Neumann, Kellner & Dawson-Shepherd, 1997; Rice, 1963; Stapley, 1996).

The 'systems' designation refers to the open systems concepts that provide the dominant framing perspective for understanding the structural aspects of an organisational system. The organisation as an external reality, comparatively independent of the individual, affect the individual in significant emotional and psychological ways. In terms of consulting to organisations, it is believed that learning from the personal experience is of fundamental concern to facilitate development, insight, understanding and 'deep' change (Bion, 2003). The 'psychodynamic' designation refers to psychoanalytic perspectives on individual experiences and mental processes (such as transference, resistance, object relations and fantasy) as well as on the experience of unconscious group and social processes, which are simultaneously both a source and a consequence of unresolved and unrecognised organisational difficulties. A central feature of this view posits the existence of primitive anxieties – of a prosecutory and depressive nature – and the mobilisation of social defence mechanisms against them. The operations of such defences are conceptualised as either impeding or facilitating task performance and responses to and readiness for change and new learning.

Bion's (1961; 2003; Lipgar & Pines, 2003) three basic assumptions are seen as the cornerstones for studying relationships in organisational systems (Kets de Vries, 1991; López-Corvo, 2003; Miller, 1993; Rice, 1965; Rioch, 1970). These are dependency (the group's unconscious projection for attention and help onto an authority figure as parental object); fight / flight (as defence mechanisms in trying to cope with discomfort, again involving the authority figure for example management or leadership); and pairing (with perceived powerful others such as the manager or leader, or splitting the authority figure(s) as an individual or as a pair in order to be able to identify with one part as a saviour). Later, two additional basic assumptions were added, namely one-ness (also referred to as me-ness by Turquet, 1974) (representing the individual's escape into his/her own fantasy and inner safe, comfortable and good world, whilst denying the presence of the group, seen as the disturbing and bad part); and we-ness (Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996) (the opposite of me-ness, where group members join into a powerful union with and absorption into an omnipotent force, surrendering the self for passive participation). Basic group functioning refers to 'getting stuck' in these assumption behaviours, whereas work group functioning refers to insight into and taking responsibility for own human relationships.

Conflict and anxiety (primitive anxiety of the prosecutory and depressive nature) are accepted as the basic concepts in this model (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). Added to these, the following concepts are relevant to the understanding of EE practices in this research.

- Defence mechanisms are used unconsciously by the system to act against anxiety in order to stay emotionally uninvolved and in control, to avoid pain and discomfort, and to gain a sense of safety, security and acceptance (Gabelnick & Carr, 1989; Neumann et al., 1997). Examples are rationalisation,

intellectualisation, regression and denial. In projection, the bad or unwanted parts of the self are put **onto** someone or something else – this does not influence or change the behaviour of the receiver of the projection.

- Projective identification is an inter system, object relational, anxiety reducing process where one part of the system (as subject) projects material **into** the other part (as object), who identifies with the projection (taking it into its own system) leading to its behaviour being influenced (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, 1991; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).
- Counter transference refers to the state of mind in which other people's feelings are experienced as one's own (Miller, 1993; Neumann et al., 1997). Projective identification frequently leads to the recipient's acting out the counter transference deriving from the projected feelings.
- Valence refers to the system's tendency-cum-unconscious-vulnerability or predisposition to being drawn into one or other basic assumption type of functioning (Bion, 1961). Thus one part of the system may regularly receive projections and experience feelings around anger, guilt, shame, envy or satisfaction, or act out a role such as the fighter, spokesperson, the peace maker on behalf of the larger system (French & Vince, 1999).
- The paranoid-schizoid position manifests in a young or immature system. Paranoid refers to badness being experienced as coming from outside the self, and schizoid refers to splitting off (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Colman & Geller, 1985; Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). Schizoid splitting refers to the splitting off and projecting outwards of those parts of the self perceived as bad, thereby creating external figures who are both hated and feared. Splitting (or dichotomisation – Pinderhughes, 1971) and projection exploits the natural boundary between insiders and outsiders in the system. The projection of feelings of badness to the outside of the self is used to simplify psychic complexities and to produce a state of illusionary goodness and self-idealisation. This often leads to fragmentation because contact was lost between parts of the system which belong together inside its boundary. If no contact or dialogue takes place between the system's conflicting parts or points of view, change, development and growth are inhibited and frustrated, thus creating a rigid culture (Czander, 1993; Miller, 1993; Shapiro & Carr, 1991).
- The depressive position follows on the paranoid-schizoid, once the system is mature enough to recognise that its painful feelings come from their own projections. Then these feelings can be returned to their source in saying: 'These are my / your feelings, not your/mine'. Firstly, this gives rise to blaming and the ricocheting of projections back and forth. However, if the system can tolerate the feelings long enough to reflect on them, and contain the anxieties they stir up, it may be possible to bring about change (Bion, 1970). When the timing is right and some of the projections can be re-owned, splitting decreases and there is a reduction in the polarisation and antagonism. This reparation promotes integration and co-operation within the system and a shift (from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position). When the group is functioning in the depressive position, more points of view will be valued and a full range of emotional responses will be available to explore. For example, a group or team may be more able to encompass the emotional complexity of the work in which they all share, and no one member will be left to carry his/her fragment in isolation. However, the depressive position is never attained once and for all – when survival or self-esteem are threatened, there is a tendency to return to paranoid-schizoid functioning (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Czander, 1993; Miller, 1993; Shapiro & Carr, 1991).
- Boundaries refer to the physical and psychological borders around and spaces between parts of the system. Its function is to contain anxiety, thus making life controllable, safe and

contained (Cytrynbaum & Lee, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993; Kets de Vries, 1991).

- **Authorisation.** This concept refers to empowering a part of the system to act on behalf of another in a specific role, carrying either observational, representative, negotiational or plenipotentiary authority (Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).
- **Representation** refers to acting on behalf of a system in negotiating the crossing, resisting or erecting of a boundary. A clear level of authority carried by the negotiator contributes to the success of the interaction, but if these boundaries are unclear, the high level of anxiety may lead to immobilisation and dis-empowerment (Kets de Vries, 1991; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).
- **Relationship** refers to any type of face-to-face interaction, as it happens in the here-and-now. Relatedness refers to the ever existing relationship in the mind (Gabelnick & Carr, 1989; Neumann et al., 1997; Shapiro & Carr, 1991) with authority and with the organisation (Armstrong, 2005).
- **Containment** refers to putting a boundary around an experience or emotion – it could be experienced or avoided, managed or denied, kept in or passed on, so that its effects are either mitigated or amplified. In order to cope with discomfort, the system unconsciously needs something or someone to contain the anxiety on its behalf (Menzie's, 1993). Bion's (1970) container-contained model identifies and describes a basic dimension of human experience, namely the relationship between emotion and its containment – the container (1) can absorb, filter or manage difficult or threatening emotions or ideas (the contained) so that they can be worked with, or (2) it can become a rigid frame or shell that restricts and blocks. The contained, whether emotion, idea or person, can therefore be experienced as an overwhelming threat or as the welcome messiah.
- **Role** refers to the conscious and unconscious boundary around the way to behave. Miller (1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) referred to three types of roles, namely (1) the normative role (as ascribed to the individual or system by the organisation - what must be done), (2) the experiential role (as seen by the incumbent), and (3) the phenomenal role (as seen by others). Congruence between the three types enables taking up the role and incongruence leads to anxiety within, between systems and less effectiveness.
- **Task** refers to what needs to be done. Primary task refers to the overruling activity being supported by secondary task. Work related task fulfills and anti-task opposes the primary task (French & Vince, 1999).
- **Group-as-a-whole** refers to systems operating as collectives, such as pairs and groups, forming the psychodynamic relations, relatedness and interconnectedness (Neumann, 1999). It is also assumed that a part of the system acts and contains emotional energy, on behalf of the total. This implies that no event happens in isolation and that there is no co-incidence, but rather synchronicity (Wells, 1980).

### **The systems psychodynamic consulting stance**

The systems psychodynamic consultancy stance is a developmentally focussed, psycho-educational process for the understanding of the deep and covert behaviour in the system. Its primary task is formulated as pushing the boundaries of awareness to better understand the deeper and covert meaning of organisational behaviour, including the challenges of management and leadership (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2001; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle & Pooley, 2004; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Miller & Rice, 1976).

The systems psychodynamic consultant 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 process (Miller, 1993; Neumann et al., 1997). The consultant is alert to and interprets the covert and dynamic aspects of the organisation

and the work group that comprise it, with the focus on relatedness and how authority is psychologically distributed, exercised and enacted, in contrast to how it is formally invested. This work includes a consideration of attitudes, beliefs, fantasies, core anxieties, social defences, patterns of relationships and collaboration, and how these in turn may influence task performance, how unwanted feelings and experiences are split off and projected onto particular parts (individuals or groups) that carry them on behalf of the system (their process roles as distinct from their formally sanctioned roles), and how work roles are taken up. Menzie's (1993) emphasised the analysis of social defence aspects of structure and its relationship to task and process, thus trying to understand how unconscious anxieties are reflected in organisational structures and design (which function to defend against them).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

The design was explorative and qualitative in nature (Mouton, 1996), using case studies and interviews (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The social phenomenological approach was used (Higgs & Smith, 2003) which entails that the researcher will not be intimidated by social power or status, and will be concerned with the relevant values and ethics. The researcher asks the question, 'what is actually happening', while exploring, 'looking again' and then reflecting in ruthless honesty. Thus, the researcher attempts "to penetrate the illusion in order to get to the reality underlying the illusion" (Higgs & Smith, 2003:67).

### **Research methodology**

#### *Participants*

Three different IT organisations participated in the research. The mean staff complement in the three organisations was 285, and consisted of 83% white, 3% black (African) and 14% coloured and Indian employees. Only white people (mostly men), were employed in senior management positions and in total, white males filled 58% of the staff complement.

For purposes of data processing and interpretation, the three organisations were seen as similar because of the following characteristics. All three were medium to large organisations acting as the South African divisions of international IT companies, producing and distributing e-commerce software solutions and providing IT outsourcing; implemented their Employment Equity Programme (EEP) during 2001 according to the provisions of the Employment Equity Act (no 66) (1998), namely 'to promote the national institution of legislation requiring the equitable hiring, development and promotion of previously disadvantaged employees, especially women and those not classified as white males'; framed the aim of their EEP as 'to address previous social inequalities and to better the quality of work life of employees'; their Human Resources Departments (HRD) questioned the effectiveness of their EEP in employing and retaining non-white employees; and had at least one HR practitioner permanently assigned to the EEP.

One HR practitioner from the first and two each from the second and third organisations were included for interviewing (N=5).

#### *Data collection technique*

An unstructured face-to-face interview (Brewer & Millward, 2004; De Vos, 2002; Kvale, 1996) was used where the participant used his/her own EEP as a case study.

#### *Data collection procedure*

The five HR practitioners were interviewed in a quiet office in their own organisations. The aim of the interview was to

explore the experiences of the individual concerning the EEP for which they were responsible. The interview started with the question, "Tell me about your experience of the EEP – its planning, implementation, management, agendas and minutes of meetings, and your experience of the human relationships related to the EEP". Hereafter the researcher only asked qualifying questions such as "tell me more about .../what do you mean when you say ...". Detailed notes were taken throughout the interviews. All interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

#### Data analysis

The interviews were content analysed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), defined as a process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising of data. The procedure comprised firstly, of reading through of all responses a couple of times for familiarisation. Secondly, the responses were read through again according to Schafer's (2003) systems psychodynamic interpretive stance. Thirdly, examples of the above mentioned basic assumptions were extracted from the data to understand how conflict and anxiety manifested (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993). Fourthly, the different examples were clustered (Clarkson & Nuttall, 2000) which indicated the existence of certain prominent themes. Fifthly, common themes were created by means of phenomenological analysis (Higgs & Smith, 2003; Marton, 1994). Lastly, trustworthiness (De Vos, 2002) was ensured by having the results examined by a psychologist, to whom this approach and stance were well known.

## RESULTS

The following seven themes manifested in this research.

### 1 The fantasy of own power versus opportunities for 'the other'

According to the HR practitioners, the managers in the organisations often referred to the IT industry in an elevated manner. It was for example called "the fastest developing industry in the world" and "one of the technically most advanced". These expressions and their accompanying and underlying messages, created a boundary between two images, namely (1) 'our own power' – growth, control, competition and (2) of opportunities for 'the other's' growth and development.

Most of the managers could relate easily to the first image of own power as if this was 'their comfort zone'. The message sent to the HR practitioners was overt, rational and open, for example, "what are the facts / what is the right thing to do/let's talk about it". They referred to using organisational development initiatives to get new suitable technicians trained to take up their roles as IT specialists. "This will help us all in becoming more productive", "experience more job satisfaction", "develop our careers in this wonderful industry" and to contribute towards "the organisation's economic and social well-being". The shadow side of this image was expressed in for example, "in our industry, you need the knowledge and experience. Whether you are white or black, it makes no difference, but everybody knows that the knowledge is held by the whites".

The second image of opportunities for 'the other', created a lot of anxiety, which led to different defensive reactions (see theme 2). When discussions during meetings moved from the 'own power' image, towards the EEP as a way of providing opportunities for the previously excluded 'others' (black, coloured and Indian applicants) to join them in the industry's and organisational growth, it was as if "the system went into a shock mode", followed by silence. This was interpreted as a classic rational-irrational conflict, with the above rational

message, being countered by an irrational silence (holding back, suppression), because "it is seen as politically incorrect to say anything against the EEP". It is hypothesised that the EEP represented for the white male manager – who sees himself as in power – something negative, unspeakable, unacceptable and that needs to be avoided – the denigrated part of the system. Therefore, the collective white male subsystem unconsciously colluded to resist the change and to maintain past sentiments of sameness and togetherness. This links with what Lawrence (1999; 2000) called the self-interest, self-importance and selfishness of systems in power, with the split between "planning and speaking positively about ..." and "doing nothing" about the issue.

The image of opportunities for 'the other', may also have a positive side to it. It is interpreted that the white male subgroup is used by the system to contain the resistance on behalf of the larger system. This gives 'the others' the opportunity to work with the (sometimes) free-floating and creative anxiety to find their way into the system and to establish themselves as IT specialists (in spite of the white male resistance).

On the macro IT industry level, it is hypothesised that white males as a collective South African previously empowered subsystem, is benefiting from this white male containment role in the IT industry, using this industry as one of the last secure bastions of dominance. It was as if they were living in the fantasy that the IT industry is immune against EE and its 'eroding' effects.

### 2 The system's unbearable anxiety creates splits and defences

The executive committees of all three organisations authorised its management committees to take up their role as custodians for EE in their organisations. On the conscious level, the all white management committees took up this role with good intentions ("they bought into the process"). They made the appropriate rational and legal decisions towards the implementation of the EEP. Next, they authorised "their HRD's to run the programme" with its mutually agreed upon aims.

These conscious and rational management strategies to accept and promote EE, introduced specific South African change and transformation dynamics into the organisations as collective systems which, according to De Jager, Cilliers and Veldsman (2004), inevitably creates unbearable anxiety. In this case, survival anxiety manifested amongst white staff members ("some people realised that they can loose their jobs") followed by resistance as a defence. It is hypothesised that this subsystem became the representation of (keeping) the status quo ("we have to stand together"). As a result of the resistance, various forms of splits emerged in order to differentiate between the self and others, between good and bad. To keep the fantasy alive of the self as 'good object', the collective, socially structured defence mechanisms operate, such as to project its own unacceptable characteristics onto other parts of the system (Klein, 1959; 1975).

Examples of the splits and their defences were the following.

- The experience of EE was filled with anxiety primarily around the losing and "giving away" of power. For example, jobs and applicants were categorised as "white" versus "black", previously advantaged staff members were referred to as superior in terms of IT qualifications and experience, and previously disadvantaged applicants as "lacking experience in IT".
- The white management groups, owned the positive and exiting initiation of the EEP ("they seemed so chuffed with themselves"). On the other hand, they have split of the more difficult part of their task, namely the responsibility towards ensuring its effectiveness, which was then projected onto the HRD ("the programme was dumped on

HR and they only ask about the EE figures – never about the relationships”).

- Managers tended to over accentuate the good part of the system, for example, “look at the wonderful opportunities we’ve offered black employees who would not otherwise have had such a well-paying job”. This focus took the attention away from and denied the bad, frustrating part, namely that blacks on average only comprised 3% of the staff total and that no black person filled a senior management position.
- The white line management subsystem has split off their fears and negative perceptions of EE and projected these onto the HRD, blaming them for being unable to source in “suitably qualified and experienced African candidates”.
- When senior IT management positions became available, very few line managers ever requested the HRD to advertise for an EE candidate. When they were reminded of the EEP, they resisted with arguments about scarce and unavailability of resources. When the HRD presented possibilities either via application forms or in person, line management “never accepts any of the employment equity candidates presented for selection or promotion”. When at an EE forum meeting the HRD was asked why the organisation does not do more to promote EE, a line manager said, “we do not need to - employment equity is not a problem at our organisation”. Line management’s denial of the existence of the EEP unconsciously served to keep the white majority IT specialists safely in their positions of power and jeopardised the hiring, promoting and development of previously disadvantaged citizens. One HR practitioner remarked, “I have never seen intelligent people getting so caught up in their own irrational ideas before”, which might indicate the high level of anxiety underlying EE.
- The split between “those who have lots and will get more, versus those who have little and will get less” manifested in the payment of exorbitant remuneration to reward and retain loyal (white) staff in this competitive industry. Dynamically, the previously advantaged became more affluent, excluding the previously disadvantaged using entitlement as a defence against “letting them in”. This represents an unconscious ‘matching’ process between individual and the organisation (Obholzer, 1999), with individuals expecting to have their comfortable, well-rewarded positions safeguarded. It was as if the previously advantaged used their valency to find fortune, and to stay in the privileged position. This demand on the inner world and dynamics to change, makes it even harder for the system to accommodate any change. One manager remarked, that “suitable black employment applicants are hard to find because they have only recently started entering the field of IT, and they are not yet as highly skilled as their white counterparts”. This is interpreted as the ego’s resistance to accept a new reality that is threatening its very existence with high levels of anxiety and pain.
- In one of the organisations, the administration staff (doing similar work) was split and isolated from one another. The whites were seated in a main open-plan office, while the blacks were seated in a far removed location.
- Gender splits occurred, for example in some of the meetings, an Indian female would constantly only be responded to by other females. The men “seem so disinterested once she starts to speak”.
- An image split occurred in one organisation where a dynamic black female was appointed as receptionist and shifted to a very prominent seating position in the foyer to act as a symbolic “gate keeper” and to represent the organisation’s favourable “face of diversity” to the outside world. It is hypothesised that she was not only used by the system to create a positive image, but that she is also used to ‘keep the bad out’ in order for the rest to feel good about diversity.
- The fight/flight basic assumption occurred in many meetings. Fight manifested in the rationalised perception

of “we are jeopardising the EE”, for example in the remark “at least we provide bursaries to African students”. Flight manifested for example in the remark “EE will not happen overnight - it is a complicated process, and we need to work slowly on it”, and “we are already doing more than other companies”.

- When diversity training was suggested by one of the organisations, it was shot down by a very influential manager as, “but you are already doing staff development!” The same happened when a formal EE forum was introduced as a platform for the ‘voice’ of the black minority. This is interpreted as the empowered subsystem’s strict managing of its boundary in order to stay safe against the perceived threat (see Lawrence, 1999).

Theoretically, the split between the white male subgroup and the black subgroup, unconsciously serves the purpose of survival (as suggested by Chattopadhyay, 2002). The evidence in these case studies suggested that the survival was not about losing a job (“many of our colleagues have left the company and easily found other and better jobs”), but rather about losing a powerful position (“I don’t see why I should give away what we have built up”). The above behaviour is interpreted as defences of rationalisation (of the own position of power), denial (of the requirements of the EE act), and projection (onto ‘the other’, a minority in this system but a majority in the country, as a dumping place for own feelings of self-righteousness). It is hypothesised that this is an unconscious collusive process which served to sustain the basic assumption group functioning, as a defence against the primary task focussed work group functioning (Bion, 1961; 2003).

### 3 The HRD is identifying with the system’s projections

The HRDs spent lots of time and energy on the formulation of the EE policies, plans, targets and advertisements of vacancies for EE positions (“we took this task very seriously”). At the same time, all of the HR practitioners mentioned their exhaustion in doing this work, having the experience of “never getting it right” and “never performing good enough” – “our organisation is just unable to employ and retain black, coloured and Indian employees, in spite of implementing and managing an official EEP”. They expressed feelings of “extreme frustration”, “almost giving up/becoming hopeless” and “I fear that we will not succeed”. This is interpreted as projective identification – not only did the larger organisational system project its anxiety about EE onto the HRD, the HR practitioners **took in** the projections, acting as containers of the anxiety and acting out the system’s exhaustion, performance anxiety, fear and anger. It was as if they became the ‘holding’ object as well as the victim of the EEP (see Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

It is hypothesised that the HRD became the object of dependence containing the frustration, helplessness and disempowerment in the system. It is then no surprise that evidence of counter dependence was heard when a line manager said, “HR is doing nothing to promote the hiring and development of non-white staff in this company – we will have to make another plan”. It is hypothesised that the HRD is used by the system to carry the conflict (the double message of helping AND not helping). The hostility in this message may have been meant for other authority figures, such as EXCO, management and even the government (see Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

Also evident was that the HRD’s position was split, between the above ‘bad’ and a substitute (fantasy) good parent (mother, anima) role (becoming the ‘good breast’ – Klein, 1975). On the one level this refers to having empathy towards management – “the managers are in such a difficult position – they want to be law abiding citizens, yet the need to survive is so strong that they follow their hearts, rather than their heads”. This is interpreted as identification with the enemy

(Freud, 1921) – identifying with and showing insight into the experience of the aggressor in the unconscious plot. On another level, the HR practitioners had to listen and take care of “the suffering blacks” in the system – “it is as if HR became the place where the EE candidates could sit and cry about their frustrations”.

#### 4 Split is followed by paranoia and blame

The above mentioned splits were followed by white managers remarking, “what do they have against us?”, and “why do they want us out – we are doing a good job”. It is interpreted that this message was addressed in general to ‘the authority out there’ (which could include God). It is hypothesised that the subsystem in stress, who can not solve its conflict on its own, needs to split off its bad and prosecutory objects and unwanted impulses, for example its negative perceptions of black people and its intolerance with change, newness and inclusion of ‘the other’. Thus the system coped with the anxiety by splitting off the discomfort, and externalised it in the form of blame onto unspecified authority figures (see Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2001).

#### 5 Connecting idealisation and competence

In terms of the black employees as a minority, it was reported that they did not initiate conscious attempts to rectify inequalities. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as fear to speak out against the strong power being contained by the white male subgroup (similar to what happened during the apartheid regime). On the other hand, this can be interpreted as idealisation of the white male’s power.

It is hypothesised that the power contained and expressed by the white males, originated from two places. The first was “their own power hunger” and the second, a projection from the less empowered black subsystem, needing the white male subsystem to carry the power on their behalf. Because these projections were about power and they were also powerful, the white male’s valence for power (being in a position of power already) made it easier for this subgroup to identify with the projection. This made the containment of the power easier and more successful. As only a few females played significant roles in the EE scenario, interpretations about their contributions could not be made.

The evidence suggested that this idealisation was about projected competence and incompetence, followed by identification with these projections. One manager said, “everyone must realise by now that the white managers have been in these positions of knowledge for a long time, and the industry needs to keep us here”. The interpreted is that unconsciously power and competence became confused and seen as the same idealised thing. Therefore, the black subgroup as ‘the other’ is denied moving into a position of competence in the IT environment. It is hypothesised that the white male subgroup unconsciously gained relief from internal conflicts, namely the painful need for self-preservation and to stay in power, versus the idea of having competent black people competing for their or other positions.

Next, the black subgroup as the recipients of the projection of incompetence, were ‘seduced’ into thinking, feeling, and acting congruently. Hiring black applicants only on entry-level positions, and not developing or promoting existing black staff, have unconsciously and collectively, created the belief in the black subgroup that they are incompetent in the IT industry. This indicated the effectiveness and strength of the projection.

It is interpreted that both the white male and the black subgroups, projected competence onto and into the white males, and incompetence onto and into the black subgroup. It is hypothesised that if the white males ‘claim’ and are given all the available competence, it leaves little to

be competent about for any other subgroup, and vice versa for incompetence.

#### 6 Envy and guilt form a vicious circle

The above hypothesis leads to further interpretations around envy. The black subgroup experienced envy towards the white male subgroup’s power and about what ever it may represent (such as economical wealth, prestige, status). On the other hand, the white male subgroup experienced envy towards the black subgroup being protected by the EEP in the new South Africa and being sought after by many organisations. It is hypothesised that keeping black employees in the minority and inhibiting their career progress and advancement to higher levels, was a response to the perceived threat they pose to the white ego ideal. Therefore, the resistance towards EE served as a mechanism to keep the black subgroup “in their place”, and to protect their own painful unconscious issues from surfacing.

Envy refers to the desire to spoil something good simply because it is good but does not belong to the self (Huffington et al., 2004), and often results in regression rather than progression, destruction rather than construction (Guttman, Ternier-David & Verrier, 1999). In addition, envy and guilt form and fuel a vicious circle. The evidence suggested that envy harboured destruction as well as feelings of anger and even hate towards the person having an object or quality that one covets but cannot acquire. The envious person will therefore firstly seek to destroy the object of envy, and then tries to destroy the person having the object. It is interpreted that the white male subgroup experienced guilt due to their unconscious envy of the black subgroup for their favourable position in the labour market. It is hypothesised that the white male subgroup needed to destroy the object they do not possess through active sabotage or by withholding necessary co-operation (such as the hiring, developing and promoting of blacks, coloureds and Indians). This resulted in the many hostile splits between parts of the organisation (see Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004).

Furthermore, envy can stem directly from an even deeper guilt, experienced by those who know themselves neither to be perfect, nor to conform to the ego ideal that their own narcissism continually exalts (Guttman, Ternier-David & Verrier, 1999). It is interpreted that the white male subgroup unconsciously realised that they harboured prejudices that confounded diversity efforts, that they do not conform to their ideal self-perception namely to relate perfectly to all races in the workplace. This leads to guilt, which again resulted in envy of individuals who may personify some or all of these idealised traits. It is hypothesised that the white male subgroup fell into a masochistic spell, because envy is anger directed at the self for falling short of perfection, irrespective of past successes and satisfaction.

A further interpretation is that the inability to maintain perfection, and the associated impossibility of satisfying such narcissistic needs, caused the majority white male subgroup to adopt a posture of omnipotence. For example, a manager said, that the white people “have superior expertise in the field of Information Technology”. This acceptance occurred, firstly because of the perceived competence projected onto the majority white males subsystem, and secondly because the majority rules, and as such they have the power to place this insatiable narcissistic need at the very heart of the organisation.

Skolnick and Green (1999) referred to the manifesting difficulties within the relationship between diverse groups, being confounded by envy, hatred and paranoia, and failure to understand differences and perhaps, a lingering conviction that acceptance of ‘the other’ is against the divine order. This seems to be evident in some South African

organisations where diversity initiatives are resisted on the basis that they are cost-inefficient, have negative effects on productivity and cause workplace disruption (Matthews, 1998; Pretorius, 2003).

### 7 Coping lies in either the we or the me

In meetings it was often said that "we do not see in colour - everyone is the same". It is interpreted that the anxiety about having to change when 'the other' or difference became part of the established collective, we-ness manifested. It is hypothesised that white male subsystem unconsciously united itself into a strong team-ness who wanted to believe that it can resolve issues of infiltration only when there are no individual voices. Therefore the system needed to deny its diversity, confused equality with sameness, used flight into sameness and became a quasi whole in order to survive, pretending that diversity issues do not exist or will disappear when confronted by a united front. This behaviour created the image of a laager (in Afrikaans 'laertrek').

One-ness (or me-ness) manifested in HRD meetings when individuals used well-worn clichés such as "I am doing all I can to develop black staff/EE is in the hands of the line manager", with the belief that the smaller part of the system is isolated and alone. It is interpreted that flight into individualism (the Euro-centric sentiment) acted as an unconscious rejection of the collectivist (African) norm inherent to the concept of EE. It is hypothesised that the individual culture is used as a defence against working with collective organisational and/or South African issues (and EE practices). More evidence hereof was the impression in EE meetings of non-group and anti-task behaviour (Bion, 1970), keeping itself busy with the disempowering rather than the empowering of staff.

## CONCLUSION

The evidence in the case studies suggested that the EEPs in these three IT organisations were not working effectively - its primary task could not be fulfilled. It was approved by management, planned and implemented by the HRD with good intentions. However, consciously and unconsciously, the irrational behaviour led by the white male subgroup, derailed and deconstructed the good intent and plans to a situation where the EEP became a forum where the different subgroups played out their power struggle. It was interpreted that the system gave power to a very strong white male subgroup, which was strengthened by more projections of power onto this part of the system, which made the identification with the projections easier. The counter side of the projection was the denigration onto and into 'the other' - mostly the black minority, who then also identified with the projections. Thus the total system got stuck in its own unconscious collusion to keep the status quo (see De Jager, Cilliers & Veldsman, 2004) and to not contribute towards EE. The EXCO and management subsystems were reluctant to take up their leadership roles and did not authorise themselves and those participating in the EEP, towards delivering a successful outcome. The HRD was caught up in a difficult middle role, acting without the authority to deliver what was contracted, which led to the whole system not producing the contracted outcome.

The primary hypothesis is that the EEPs of all three these IT organisations were stuck in the paranoid-schizoid position, that the people involved in the programmes were caught up in basic group functioning, performing anti-task behaviour and that they could not work through their object relations towards effective group relationships.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reconstruct the EEP identity, the system needs to move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position. This implies that the different EE role players and subgroups, from the EXCO, through to the management groups and the HRD, should take up their EE leadership roles with the authority delegated to them, and start to talk openly and maturely about projections onto the different parts of the system. Only if each part can own its projections, will it be possible to listen to all the different stories and to understand the emotional complexity of EE in the organisation as a system. Dynamically, this means diminishing the splitting, polarisation and antagonism in favour of reparation.

It is recommended that these organisations implement the above through a series of systems psychodynamic (group relations) training experiential sessions, conducted by a group of psychoanalytically informed consultants (see Cilliers & May, 2002). The primary task can be framed around the construct of diversity (see Hermon, 1996; Human, 1996; Jackson & Ruderman, 1995). These sessions could be planned to form part of regular EE meetings as a reflective post about 'what are we doing here and how is this contributing towards our primary task?'

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