

## A Positive Experience of Diversity Management: The Influence of Leadership Style

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**ABSTRACT** It has been generally recognised that the workforce in its diversity is changing and that these changes affect the leaders and managers and increase the levels of complexity and diversity in organisations. In order to manage and optimise the increasingly diverse workforce, exceptional abilities of managers and leaders are required. The objective of this study is to establish the kind of leadership style that is needed in organisations in order to create a positive experience of diversity management. To meet this objective, an empirical research study was carried out in eleven workplaces in three businesses in South Africa using a diversity survey instrument. The results shed light on the kind of leadership style organisations require to continue to be successful in diversity management. An engaging leadership style appears to result in a more positive experience of diversity management. The findings and implications of the study are discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

Every day, managers and leaders of organisations deal with opportunities and challenges in an environment of diversity. Discriminating practices are widespread in organisations and society and when they surface in the workplace, they cause major challenges for leaders and managers. If those managers and leaders who are properly prepared to deal with the challenges and opportunities take advantage thereof, they will succeed in being effective in a workplace of diversity (Mutjaba and Sungkhawan 2009).

Managing demographic diversity in the workplace, according to Lumadi (2008), is a daunting task necessitating perseverance, commitment and dedication. He further states that the justification for promoting diversity in a multicultural environment is based on the claim that the policies create better decision-making processes and enhance creativity and innovation. This statement is also supported by Capozza and Brown (Lumadi 2008).

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Weech-Muldonado et al. (2002) state that major demographic trends are changing the face of the USA's labour market and those managers increasingly face a more diverse workforce. This ultimately brings about that the goal of managing diversity is to enhance workforce and customer satisfaction, to improve communication among members of the workforce, and to improve the organisational workforce.

Although South Africa always had a diverse racial, ethnic and cultural demography, a rapid socio-economic, political and demographic transformation has taken place since 1994. The Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) was promulgated by the South African Government with the aim to facilitate workplace transformation, incorporating the elimination of unfair discrimination and the implementation of affirmative action to enable equitable representation of employees from different ethnic group and gender groups in the workplace. This is inherently part of the process of increasing and managing diversity and identifying barriers to fair employment (Gildenhuis 2008).

High performance organisations typically foster a work environment in which people are enabled and motivated to contribute to the goals of the organisations and need to be inclusive, drawing on the strengths of employees at all levels from all backgrounds. This is an approach consistent with diversity management (US Government Accountability Office 2005).

It has been generally recognised that the workforce in its diversity is changing and that these changes affect the leaders and increase levels of complexity and diversity in business (Dittman 2005; Sampath 2006; Sutton 2007). With a diverse group of workers participating in the workforce, managers/leaders increasingly need to take into account the impact of different cultures on the workgroups (Chang and Thorenou 2004). Workplace diversity has, moreover, evolved beyond the visible differences such as ethnic group, gender and disability to include general transition, which refers to general differences at work, changing values towards the work-life balance, lifestyle, career commitment, expectations, ethnic group, gender politics, religion, and social behaviour (Dittman 2005).

In order to manage and optimise the ever-increasing diverse workforce with the above mentioned generational differences, exceptional abilities of managers and leaders are required. The new understanding of diversity involves more than increasing the number of different identity groups on the payroll (Thomas and Ely 2002). It also requires that the experience of diversity in an organisation results from pervasive styles of management. Diversity management, according to Wisegeek (2010), can be adapted to many different types of working environments and be integrated into different types of management styles.

The task of successful diversity management falls on the organisational leaders (Cole 2007). Managing diversity through leaders is about recognising and managing individual differences, not only the static socio-demographic attributes, but also dynamic changes in people's experiences, motivations, needs and interactions within the context of work and organisations (Mulholland et al. 2006).

Jayne and Dipboje (2004) claimed that leveraging diversity for the benefit of the organisation requires line manager ownership of the diversity strategy. The results of their study suggested that perceptions of diversity management might be separable from the perception of management style and leadership traits. Successful diversity management also requires management to possess skills in leadership, organisational development, psychology, communication, measurement and assessment (Friday and Friday 2003).

The competencies needed to manage a multicultural workgroup have become crucial for any organisation if it is to gain a competitive advantage (Chang and Thorenou 2004). Workplace leaders, according to Albrecht (2000), need to adapt continuously to the internal and external challenges influencing the workplace. Mintzberg (2004) argued that an engaging leadership style is necessary in order for 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses to continue to be successful, while Cox (1993) suggested that the leaders' competencies in dealing with diversity issues might have an impact on how people feel about their employees and positions.

Diversity management and leadership practices are known to enhance workforce and customer satisfaction, to improve communication among members of the workforce, and to further improve organisational performance. However, only some organisations choose to respond to workforce and customer demographics by initiating diversity management practices and becoming diversity leaders (Weech-Maldonado et al. 2002).

What should have become evident from the discussion so far is that there are so many elements contained in diversity management and that in order to execute it successfully in an organisation care has to be taken that the managers and leaders apply the correct leadership style. The question consequently rises as to what leadership style(s) can be equated to successful diversity management? Leadership style as a key component of the research problem is therefore analysed from the interactive leadership style approach. The leadership competency model of Mintzberg (2004), comparable with the interactive leadership theory of McClelland (1975) and Burnham (2003), is relied on in answering the research question. What kind of leadership style is required in organisations in order to create a positive experience of diversity management and continue to be successful?

In this study, leadership style is regarded as the behaviour a leader uses to achieve the overall objective of the organisation (Blake and Mouton 1975). As a component of diversity management experience, it is regarded as the activities of a given social whole, such as a workplace, which falls within the experiential file of individuals involved or included in the whole (Mead 1934 as quoted by Gildenhuis 2008).

Although varying definitions of diversity management exist (See, Bledsoe and Oatswal 2008; Weech-Muldonado et al. 2002; Holton 2009; Mujtaba et al. 2009; Lumadi 2008; Swane-poel 2010; Thomas 1990), all of them have social, economic, political, legal and educational threads. For their purpose, the researchers will suffice with Thomas' (1990) view of diversity management being a planned systematic and comprehensive managerial process for developing an organisational environment that works for all employees. The process of creating a positive, dignified experience of diversity management includes the principles of performance management, development and motivation in managing diversity.

### Objectives of the Study

In view of the research question posited above, the objective of this study is to establish the kind of leadership style that is required in organisations in order to create a positive experience of diversity management. The study proposes that an interactive leadership style is required to establish a positive experience of an inclusive diversity environment.

Specific research questions that arise from the objective of the study are:

- ♦ Do ethnic group and gender differences influence the experience of diversity management?
- ♦ Is diversity management experience related to leadership style?
- ♦ Does an engaging leadership style relate positively to the experience of diversity management?

It is the premise of this study that an emerging leadership style, as described by Mintzberg (2004), would result in a positive experience of diversity management, measured according to the items included in the five-factor model of Roberson (2004).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The empirical research studied the experience of diversity management in selected South African organisations, using a diversity and inclusion survey instrument. The questions were aligned with the model of critical indicators of diversity and inclusion management of Rober-

son (2004). To determine the leadership style as a component of diversity management experience, the prevalent leadership styles in the selected organisations had to be established. Leadership styles were determined using a self-analysis inventory. The results of the empirical study are analysed within the framework of theory in order to establish a suitable relationship between the data – what the experience of diversity management in organisations is, whether the experience differs between ethnic group and gender groups and whether the pervasive leadership style in the businesses is related to this experience.

The possible existence of significant variances between ethnic group, gender and generational groups within the research populations was measured in order to establish whether the experience of diversity differs between subgroups. Convenience sampling was used in this study. Effect size was determined in order to interpret the proportion variation in the response variables. Ethnic, gender and age (generation) groups were used as moderators in this study, where the experience of diversity management is treated as the independent variable and leadership style as the dependent variable.

### Sample

Information for the empirical study was obtained from employees and managers in three selected South African organisations. Random sampling was not feasible in this study. Employees and managers were invited to participate voluntarily in the project, from a "captive audience" of managers present at the time of the survey, to obtain the quantitative data on leadership styles, as a matter of convenience.

Convenience sampling was used to establish an approximation of reality. Ellis and Steyn (2003) explained that the statistical significance tests could be used to show whether the results are significant or not, such as differences between means, in the case of random sampling. In the case of convenience sampling, however – which in effect are results obtained from a subpopulation – effect size should be determined to interpret the significance of results. Effect size is independent of sample size and is a measure of practical significance of the data. It might be apparent that mean scores differ statistically; however, whether the difference is large enough

to be of practical significance, has to be determined.

The sample population of this study was  $N=2669$  from eleven different workplaces in three businesses. Respondents totalled 446. The sample included both genders and different ethnic groups.

### Measuring Instrument

The Hall and Hawker (1988) self-evaluation Power Management Inventory (PMI) and diversity questionnaire were used in this empirical study to determine the leadership styles in the selected organisations. It has been taken in consideration that a pre-1994 instrument was used after the 1994 elections which resulted in a discrimination-free democratic South Africa, but the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed after a thorough peer-review and pilot-study was conducted. The PMI deals with the power and leadership style. It addresses the fundamental dynamics of human interaction. It is based on the interactive leadership theory of McClelland and Burnham (1976), which corresponds and supports the work of Mintzberg (2004).

What was relevant in this study was to determine whether practically significant differences between groups exist. In order to comment on the practical significance of groups, the standardised difference between the means of the populations is used. When comparing different means, Cohen (1988) provided guidelines for the interpretation of effect size as: small effect,  $d = 0.2$ ; medium effect,  $d = 0.5$ ; and large effect is,  $d = e \cdot 0.8$ . Data with  $d$  larger than and equal to 0.8 is considered practically significant in this study.

Furthermore, it is important to know whether a relationship between age, gender and ethnic group and the factors on diversity management is practically significant. This study also seeks to establish whether the relationship is large enough to be important. The guideline of Cohen (1988) is used as follows: small effect,  $w = 0.1$ ; medium effect,  $w = 0.3$ ; and large effect,  $w = e \cdot 0.5$ . A relationship with  $w$  larger than and equal to 0.5 is considered practically significant.

It is not suitable to study the ranked typology of the leadership styles in the eleven workplaces under the statistical assumption of normal distribution with means and standard deviations. This data requires a statistical methodology that will recognise the particular character-

istics of non-normal data. The Spearman rank order correlation as a non-parametric statistic was used in this study to measure the relationship between two variables.

The Spearman rank order correlation coefficient is the measure between two variables with an absolute value between zero and one. It also serves as an effect size to indicate the strength of the relationship. Steyn (2005) provides guidelines for the interpretation of the correlation coefficient's practical significance as  $r = 0.1$  small,  $r = 0.3$  medium, and  $r = 0.5$  large. A parallel between the results of the diversity audit and the leadership styles obtained from the PMI, as presented on the typology of leadership, is drawn using this guideline. The unit analysis for the correlation between the leadership style and the experience of diversity management is the eleven workplaces.

### Statistical Analysis

Empirical results were obtained from the diversity questionnaire and leadership styles were determined using the PMI Statistical analysis including descriptive data using the SAS 2005, 2007 (SAS Institute 2007) and SPSS systems (SPSS 2006).

The construct validity of the diversity questionnaire was determined by means of the Cronbach alpha. The values for the questionnaire ranged between 0.61 and 0.81. Clark and Watson (1995) use 0.70 as a directive, while Bartholomew, Antonia and Marcia (2000) argue that between 0.60 and 0.80 is acceptable. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) consider values that vary between around the 0.50 as being the lower limit of acceptability.

An exploratory factor analysis with principal component extraction and varimax rotation was conducted in order to analyse interrelationships among the number of variables and to explain these variables in terms of common underlying dimensions (factors). The complete reliability and validation of the leadership style inventory were assessed and confirmed with the motivational scales of the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS). The scores were compared to the normative PMI sample size of  $N = 3745$  leaders (Hawker and Hall 1980). The specific reliability and validity of the Hall and Hawker (1988) inventory, determining the internal consistency of each of the scales for the particular

group of leaders included in the study, could not be established because the group data is considered too small.

## RESULTS

Construct reliability and validation of the diversity management questionnaire were originally assessed and confirmed in pilot studies in a South African enterprise from 2004 to 2006. The questionnaire was found suitable for this study.

The Cronbach alpha values were determined for each of the subscales included in the diversity management questionnaire used in this study. The average interim correlation with the total was determined to establish the strength of factor items. The ideal value between 0.15 and 0.5 was used.

The Cronbach alpha values of all subscales were found to fall within the required criteria (between 0.65 and 0.87), except for one question ("People generally make racist comments"), which presented a negative correlation of -.007 with the total standardised variables in this section.

The specific question was therefore removed from the section and treated as a separate entity in analysis. The discrimination values indicated by the individual Cronbach alpha values for deleted questions (Sections 2 to 4) are presented in Table 1. These values indicated that all questions are related to the subscales, based on the correlation with the total as well as the alpha values when questions are deleted. To answer the research questions that arose from the objectives of the research towards the overall aim of this study, a survey was undertaken in 11 organisations from selected companies. The diversity management questionnaire used was found to be inclusive of the five-factor diversity and inclusion management model of Roberson

(2004), a paradigm of Thomas and Ely (1996, 2001, 2002).

In order to determine what the experience of employees with regard to diversity management in selected organisations is, the mean scores of the items included in each of the three factors (factor scores) were determined for each respondent so that the factor scores are interpretable on the original Likert scale (1 = very negative; 2 = negative; 3 = neutral; 4 = positive; 5 = very positive). Throughout the descriptive results, reference to the mean of the factor scores is indicated using the symbol "*M*" and "*SD*" to indicate standard deviation. In Table 2, an analysis of each of the three factors is presented for the total study population as well as for ethnic group and gender.

Most of the mean scores for the experience of diversity management for all three main factors were somewhat neutral, with a tendency towards the negative for Factors 1 and 2. Respondents tended more towards the positive for Factor 3. An interesting aspect is the mean score for Factor 3 (diversity treatment fairness), which was visibly more positive ( $M = 3.19$ ) compared to the mean score for Factor 1 (leadership commitment to diversity strategic alignment) –  $M = 2.85$  ( $d = 0.41$ ) and Factor 2 (representation of diverse groups – staffing and people management) –  $M = 2.85$  ( $d = 0.47$ ). This implies that employees are visibly less positive that leaders are genuinely committed to the strategic alignment of diversity management and the people management process than about social interaction between ethnic group, gender and age groups and that work processes are fair.

The mean scores for each item included in the three main factors were regarded as significant in understanding the specific diversity management experience. These results are discussed and shown for each factor. Table 3 shows the mean score results for each item in Factor 1.

The results show that respondents are mostly *neutral* towards *positive* in their belief that managers are genuinely committed to racial and gender equality, while they seem *negative* about senior management's commitment to employing people with disabilities. Communication on diversity issues is not experienced as effective. The results presented in the table on the previous page suggest that negative scores for diversity communication are similar to negative scores for leader commitment.

**Table 1: Cronbach coefficient alpha values for diversity management subscales**

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Alpha value</i>
Section 2: Leadership commitment – strategic alignment	0.82
Section 3: Representation of diverse groups – staffing and people management	0.87
Section 4: Treatment fairness – diversity management*	0.65

\* *Question 2 has been removed from this subscale*

**Table 2: Overall mean scores of the study population for the diversity management subscales as well as for gender and ethnic group groups**

	Ethnic group				Gender		
	Total	Indian	Black	Coloured	White	Male	Female
<i>Factor 1</i>							
<i>M</i>	2.85	2.78	2.71	2.83	3.08	2.83	2.95
<i>SD</i>	0.82	0.79	0.88	0.81	0.70	0.81	0.86
<i>Factor 2</i>							
<i>M</i>	2.85	2.83	2.69	3.10	3.04	2.82	3.01
<i>SD</i>	0.72	0.80	0.77	0.74	0.71	0.77	0.73
<i>Factor 3</i>							
<i>M</i>	3.19	3.23	2.94	3.32	3.49	3.13	3.41
<i>SD</i>	0.60	0.52	0.66	0.54	0.38	0.61	0.52
Dd2							
<i>M</i>	3.07	3.00	3.31	3.25	2.79	3.10	2.98
<i>SD</i>	1.23	1.23	1.28	1.09	1.14	1.25	1.18

Mean score results for three main diversity management factors

**Table 3: Mean scores for factor 1 items: Leadership commitment to diversity strategic alignment**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Senior managers committed to racial equality	3.06	1.20
Senior managers committed to gender equality	3.20	1.10
Senior managers committed to employing disabled people	2.47	0.96
Diversity regarded as a strategic issue	3.19	1.11
Diversity communication is effective	2.67	1.12
Managers have diversity objectives in performance appraisals	2.99	1.40
Diversity does not clash with other business objectives	3.06	1.07

The mean scores for Factor 2 items indicated a more negative experience related to diversity representation and the people management processes, as shown in Table 4.

Considered generally, respondents indicated a somewhat negative experience for Factor 2. While respondents were neutral about whether clearly-defined targets exist, they tend to be somewhat more negative in their response that people management and staffing practices are fair.

Respondents disagreed ( $M = 2.94$ ) that individual career plans are in place, or that recruitment and selection practices are fair ( $M = 2.83$ ). Similarly, they did not experience promotion practices as fair ( $M = 2.71$ ). Respondents were also *negative* in their response to “it is who you know” rather than “what you know and how you perform” that results in promotions ( $M = 2.96$ ).

**Table 4: Mean scores for factor 2 items: Experience of representation – staffing and people management**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Clearly defined targets to improve diversity	3.07	1.27
Individual career plans are in place	2.94	1.24
Recruitment and selection policies are fair	2.83	1.26
People who deserve promotions usually get them	2.71	1.24
It is not who you know but what you know and how you perform that get you promoted	2.96	1.36
Increasing diversity does not lower standards	3.53	1.16
Satisfied with the way potential has been assessed	2.86	1.24
Managers have the skills to develop the diversity of staff	2.75	1.21
Enough pressure is exerted on managers to develop subordinates	2.71	1.20
Receive open and honest feedback	3.01	1.26
Performance is appraised regularly	2.98	1.23
Training is based on individual needs	2.93	1.21
Employees are regularly consulted about diversity	2.30	1.14

While respondents were *neutral* ( $M = 3.01$ ) in their view that they receive open and honest feedback, they were more *negative* about the skills of managers to develop subordinates ( $M = 2.75$ ) or that enough pressure is put on managers to develop subordinates ( $M = 2.71$ ). Moreover, respondents tended to be *negative* about regular performance appraisals occurrence ( $M = 2.98$ ) or that training is based on individual needs.

Table 5 refers to the results of Factor 3 items – diversity treatment fairness. It apparent that

**Table 5: Mean scores for factor 3 items: Diversity fairness treatment**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sexist comments are generally made	2.68	1.08
Racist comments are generally made	2.99	1.20
Mix at social functions	3.08	1.20
People greet regardless of ethnic group	3.41	1.20
Willing and open to learn about cultures	3.06	1.09
Black people accuse white people of racism when white people criticise them	3.46	1.13
Women do not accuse men of sexism when criticised	2.81	1.01
My manager treats me with dignity and respect	3.66	1.17
White people believe reverse discrimination exists	3.48	1.12
Black people have the same responsibilities and accountabilities	3.15	1.21
Women have the same responsibilities and accountabilities	3.52	1.01
Generational issues	3.55	1.02

the mean score for this section is *neutral*, tending towards the *positive* end of the scale. Respondents specifically appear relatively *neutral* towards *positive* in their experience of greeting each other regardless of ethnic group ( $M = 3.41$ ), mixing at social functions ( $M = 3.08$ ), and being willing to learn about each other's cultures ( $M = 3.06$ ).

This might indicate a degree of intercultural sensitivity and a sense of appropriate social behaviourism. Although social interaction scores for the experience of treatment fairness (Factor 3) are mostly neutral to positive, it is interesting to note that the experience of racist and sexist comments is somewhat more *negative*. It would appear that sexist comments might be regarded as slightly more prevalent ( $M = 2.68$ ), in responding that sexist comments are made compared to racist comments made ( $M = 2.99$ ).

Respondents indicated that "Black people accuse white people of racism when criticised" ( $M = 3.46$ ), while they were slightly *negative* about women accusing men of sexism when they are criticised ( $M = 2.81$ ). Of note is that respondents generally disagreed that "White people believe reverse discrimination exists" in the workplace ( $M = 3.48$ ).

Generally, these results could indicate that overt discrimination is not experienced. The experience of staffing, people development and leadership commitment practices is less positive.

For the purpose of analysing the relationship between the experience of diversity management and leadership style, the respondent leaders were considered as a proportion of the leaders in each workplace with certain leadership styles. Mintzberg's leadership styles are comparable with McClelland and Burnham's (1976) leadership motives and are referred to as a typology of the leadership styles, ranging from predominantly "personalised" (heroic) at one extreme, engaging at midpoint, to highly affiliative at the other extreme, with two "outliers", namely fight/flight leadership style and even leadership.

The results of the Spearman rank order correlations are presented next to determine the relationship between the experience of diversity management and leadership style, and more specifically to establish whether an engaging leadership style yields a more positive experience of diversity management, as suggested by the theoretical study. As explained earlier, the Spearman rank order coefficient  $r = 0.3$  is regarded as a medium practical or visible relationship and  $r = 0.5$  as large and a relationship important in practice, to determine the relationship between the two variables. The Spearman rank order correlation is indicated using the symbol "SR".

Spearman rank order correlations (SR) between leadership styles and the three main factors were determined. For the purpose of these correlations, three specific questions about leadership style from Factors 1 and 3 were included. These were "senior managers are genuinely committed to racial equality" (Question 1, Section 1, referred to as Q1.1 hereafter), "senior managers are genuinely committed to gender equality" (Question 2, Section 1, referred to as Q2.1 hereafter) and "my manager generally treats me with dignity and respect" (Question 8, Section 3, referred to as Q8.3 hereafter).

In addition, Spearman rank order correlations were determined for Dd2 "People generally make racist comments". Large significant correlations are indicated in Table 6 and discussed. The results for medium and large correlations for each factor are discussed. Table 6 indicates the results of the leadership style typography correlated with the experience of diversity management.

Table 6 shows that heroic leadership style correlates visibly negatively with Factor 1 and Factor 2, as well as being practically significant

**Table 6 : Correlation between leadership style and diversity management factors**

*Spearman rank order correlations*  
*MD pair wise deleted*

Variable	Heroic	Heroic tendencies	Engaging	Affiliative tendencies	Affiliative	Fight/flight	Even
Factor 1	-0.35	0.15	0.35	-0.17	0.10	-0.47	0.02
Factor 2	-0.41	0.04	0.44	-0.05	0.19	-0.36	0.19
Factor 3	-0.06	0.09	0.22	-0.01	-0.09	-0.38	-0.01
Q1.1	-0.26	0.10	0.33	-0.08	-0.10	-0.51	-0.11
Q2.1	-0.20	0.05	0.38	-0.11	0.05	-0.55	-0.07
Q8.3	-0.58	0.17	0.47	-0.15	0.31	-0.12	0.38
Dd2	-0.63*	-0.03	-0.69*	0.02	-0.03	0.24	-0.07

\* $p < .05$

with Q8.3 (“My manager generally treats me with dignity and respect”). Consistent with the Mintzberg model (2004), McClelland and Burnham’s theory (1976), the engaging leadership style correlates visibly positively with Factor 1, Factor 2, Q1.1 and Q2.1 and is practically significant with Q8.3. The fight/flight leadership style shows a practically significant negative correlation with Factor 1, Q1.1 and Q2.1 and a visibly negative correlation with Factors 2 and 3. It is interesting to note that no practically significant positive correlations were established for leaders with heroic tendency leadership styles.

On the other hand, the engaging leadership style resulted in a medium positive practically significant correlation with most of the dimensions measured in this study. As could be expected, the affiliative and even styles appear to correlate positively with the experience of being treated with dignity and respect by the manager, whereas the fight/flight style correlates negatively with Factors 1, 2 and 3.

Quite significant in these specific results is the strong positive correlation ( $SR = 0.63$ ) between the heroic style and Dd2 (“racist comments generally made”), whereas a negative correlation exists between such comments and engaging leaders ( $SR = -0.69$ ). The theoretical explanation of behaviour associated with the heroic leadership style suggested that the heroic leadership style could lead to communication, which could be perceived as undignified and not “ethnic group and gender free”.

## DISCUSSION

From the findings it is evident that although the respondents exhibited a somewhat more positive experience of diversity fairness (Factor

3), significant differences in experience between ethnic group and gender groups are found for Factor 1 (leadership commitment and strategic alignment of diversity management) as well as for Factor 2 (representation of diversity, people management). Non-dominant group respondents (designated groups) generally experience attributes of diversity management less positively than dominant group members (not designated groups) do. White people were most positive, followed by Indian and coloured people, while black people indicated the most negative experience of diversity management. Although fewer women participated in this study, male respondents are more positive than female respondents, other than in one workplace, where a more engaging leadership style prevails. The respondents mostly favour engaging leadership styles, whereas fight/flight leadership styles yielded a negative correlation for all diversity factors. Most respondents favour the engaging leadership style for leadership commitment and strategic alignment of diversity, as well as in the case of staffing and people management and performance management policies, other than women, who correlate positively with the heroic leadership style (Factors 1 and 2). Generally, the respondents indicated a negative experience of fair people management, staffing and promotion practices. Career development experience tended to be more negative. There is a positive correlation between the heroic leadership style and the statement “racist comments made”. Engaging leadership, however, correlates negatively with this item. Dominant group respondents are somewhat more likely to believe senior managers are committed to racial and gender equality and that diversity is regarded as a strategic issue. Employees believe people mix at social func-



tions regardless of ethnic group, greet each other and are open to learn about each other's cultures. Most ethnic group groups favour the engaging leadership style with a positive experience of diversity treatment fairness (Factor 3) and a negative one with fight/flight. White respondents favour the heroic leadership style for diversity fairness and correlate negatively with the engaging leadership style for Factor 3.

The results support the propositions of the researchers. Mintzberg's (2004) engaging leadership style generally leads to a more positive experience of diversity management, measured on the diversity and inclusion items of Roberson's (2004) five-factor model.

This study represents a step in explaining leadership style as a component of the experience of diversity management, years after the enactment of the EEA (No. 55, 1998), and socio-political democratisation in South Africa. Understanding the influence of leadership style may prove instrumental in understanding some of the dynamics of diversity management experience. Diversity management in South African businesses becomes a process of encouraging an engaging leadership style to improve performance results in organisations through effective symbolic interaction, in an ever-changing and increasingly diverse society. Generally, the results of this study contribute to the industrial sociological and psychological understanding of leadership as a diversity-related determinant in the world of work.

The difference in experience between ethnic groups in South African businesses some years after the enactment of the EEA (No. 55 of 1998) might be useful in examining the return on recruitment expenditure at the expense of establishing an inclusive culture. The overall results might suggest that the collective criteria of ethnic group and gender remain as the basis of exclusion rather than the individual criteria of merit and competence, associated with a positive experience of diversity and inclusion.

The results of this study, specifically related to Factor 3 (fairness in diversity treatment), suggest that discriminatory practice in relation to ethnic group in the South African workplace may have become less overt. Attributes of diversity and inclusion management, however, are experienced significantly differently between ethnic groups.

The results of this workplace study furthermore support Winant's (2006) assertion that enormous discrepancies and contradiction continue between official racial rhetoric and the actual dilemmas of racial experience and social organisation. "In post-apartheid South Africa, the most significant national stages have not significantly altered the life changes of the racially defined populations" (Winant 2006: 987).

Although deracialisation is part of the country's transformation aims, the concepts of ethnic group and gender remain inherent to the experience of diversity management in the workplace. The results generally indicated discontent to a significant degree among "non-dominant" groups – designated groups as defined in the EEA (No. 55 of 1998) – about how diversity and inclusion are experienced, compared to white employees. A reasonable inference could be drawn from this finding that diversity experience in organisations might still be influenced by stereotypical, historical and traditional cultural awareness associated with the generalised (narrow definition) diversity management approach.

The conclusion can furthermore be drawn that the aims of the employment equity legislation and affirmative action policies have not yet succeeded in achieving an equitable experience of the management of diversity and inclusion, free of ethnic group and gender. The degree of discontent detected could lead to decreased motivation and a consequent increase in disengagement. This, in turn, could lead to a decrease in effort, which is counterproductive to the sustainable growth of organisations.

The results of this study suggest that a heroic leadership style generally tends to create a more negative experience of diversity and inclusion. The experience of diversity management may be expected to vary as a function of the pervasive style of leadership measured in the workplace. Interpreted from a symbolic interaction perspective, the style of leadership would affect interaction through specific language and gestures used.

The results shed some light on the kind of leadership style organisations need to favour in order to continue to be successful. The results overall suggest that leaders need to commit themselves not only strategically to the diversity management process, but to a structured approach to people management dimensions consistent with all the factors indicated by Rober-

son (2004), characteristic of the learning and integration paradigm of Thomas and Ely (2002).

### LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this research study is the fact that eleven workplaces resorted in three businesses only. This will limit the generalisation of results. Respondent workplaces that undertook the survey were workplaces that conducted a comprehensive "barrier" analysis to equal employment in terms of the legislative requirements.

Respondents in the survey may have had a direct interest in diversity issues. Familiarity of respondents with the organisations' formalised diversion and inclusion initiatives may have influenced the complexity of the experience measured. Furthermore, the difference in the nature of the work between the three businesses may have influenced the research results.

The study assumes in some of its explanations that heroic leaders, motivated by goal achievement, could be motivated to deliver diversity management in accordance with legislative (EEA 1998) inspired directives and affiliate managers may also be motivated by morally justified motives, whereas engaging managers would tend to be motivated by the need for a mature, dignified environment in the interest of the business. This has not been established empirically.

### CONCLUSION

The empirical research conclusively answered each of the research questions stated in the research objectives. Leadership style has been established as a component of diversity management experience. The optimal positive experience of diversity and inclusion management would have been achieved when no significant difference is measured between the diverse groups. The study shed light on the kind of leadership style organisations need to favour in order to be successful in diversity management.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research should be undertaken on a larger sample and more businesses to verify the results of this study. Research should also be carried out on whether diversity management

experience is useful in explicating racial differences in voluntary turnover and retention. High turnover may be even more costly to organisations that invest only in increasing the level of designated groups at the expense of managing diversity and for businesses that do not pay attention to the leadership style they embethnic group. Assessment of constituent attitudes of different cultures, ethnic groups and genders toward diversity management in South Africa, and the examination and comparison of the different business diversity management models and how they relate to different management styles, also need to be placed on the research agenda.

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