

Chapter 7

Conclusions and recommendations

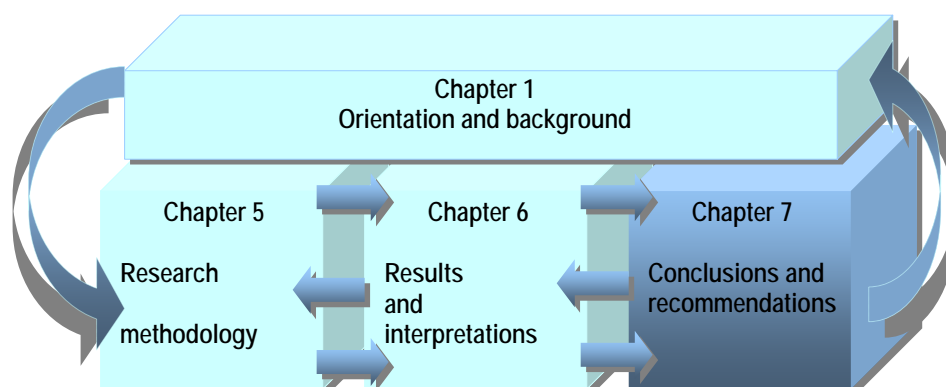
7.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of the empirical phase focuses on two main areas, i.e. conclusions and recommendations about the comparison of three case studies. These aspects are presented in relation to the overarching research question, “How do South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action (within the context of Employment Equity)?” The four sub-questions are further utilised to structure these conclusions, i.e.: “How do South African organisations comply with their duty to consult with and inform stakeholders about the process of Employment Equity?”; “What approach does South African organisations follow in the management of Employment Equity as a transformational change process?”; “What approach does South African organisations follow in the management of communication about Employment Equity as a transformational process?”; and “What approach does South African organisations follow regarding leadership within the process of Employment Equity as a transformational process?”.

Following the visual representation used in all previous chapters, the interconnectedness of Chapters 1, 5, 6 and 7 is illustrated by figure 7.1 below. The arrows in this figure emphasises the connection between Chapters 7 and 1.

Figure 7.1

Chapter 7 in relation to other elements of the empirical phase



The same principle that guided the process of interpretation in the previous chapter, also governs the process of formulating conclusions: these conclusions may also be contested. The conclusions and recommendations are also based on the theoretical insight from Chapters 2 to 4 – similar to the interpretations in Chapter 6. Finally, theoretical and empirical limitations of the study are presented under a separate heading.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

As was explained previously, the research question and sub-questions were investigated by means of 12 objectives. Two types of conclusions are presented, i.e. theoretical and empirical. Objective 1 is wholly theoretical and conclusions about the matter are thus presented as such, while conclusions about objectives 2 to 11 are presented under the second heading. Finally, a holistic view of the research phenomenon is also presented.

7.2.1 Objective 1: Conceptual framework for the management of communication about Employment Equity

It is important to note that the emphasis of Objective 1 is on the visual representation of the ideas that govern the epistemological and ontological interpretation of the process of transformational change management in this context. The purpose is not on creating yet another “model” which could serve as a “magic cure” since neither of these solutions would be appropriate within the realm of the organic worldview. The management of transformation and change communication is viewed as a “thinking science”, as conceptualised by Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (cf. 2001) and the emphasis is thus on the integration of the chaos perspective vocabulary with the challenges of this transformational context.

The conceptualisation of a framework for the management of communication about EE matters points to the paradoxes from the chaos perspective: three paradoxes are important namely strategic alignment, leadership and organisation’s dependence on outcomes. Deterministic thinking may provide “how to answers”, while the chaos perspective emphasises the awareness of the complexity of organisational life (cf. Jick & Peiperl, 2003): disequilibrium and the natural tendency (cf. Wheatley, 1994) of unpredictability, thus challenging the notions of “alignment” as proposed by Steyn and Puth (cf. 2000).

The challenge for practitioners lies in translating the principles of the chaos perspective into terminology that is not too abstract and which will result in concrete implementation strategies, as well as approaching transformation as a thinking science. Leaders are traditionally held accountable for corporate progress, thus the challenge lies in making self-directed leadership and informal leadership critical components of the corporate culture, thereby also enabling organisational learning.

Since a static model or prescriptive set of criteria is not appropriate, the emphasis should be on dimensions that will allow organisations to be flexible regarding the structures and processes through which to address this transformational context. Grobler's model (in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:204) for the alignment of a communication strategy with a corporate strategy seems to be an appropriate platform since it suggests that the dimensions of role players, specific roles and specific contributions are in constant flux. Structure is not proposed as *the* solution. Structure, if formalised, needs to follow strategy. Thus allowing the organisation to pursue transformation and learning through communication. The elements that serve as "strange attractors" in this context are the corporate values, culture and the transformational vision. Communication serves the purpose of conveying the details of these elements to all stakeholders.

Information should move freely throughout the organisation, thereby enabling all stakeholders to make decisions within the transformational context. The final paradox organisations face is that of not trying to predict or force specific outcomes even when the transformational vision would guide the efforts of the entire organisation. A more accurate understanding of non-linearity may contribute to a different approach to strategy formulation and implementation. The solution to this paradox may be the creation of a culture that supports the philosophy that transformation is not easily measured, an infinite process, requires individual transition (as described by French and Delahaye, cf. 1996) and a climate of trust that will allow for "creative/positive conflict" (as described by Ströh, cf. 1998).

The final dimension of the conceptual framework is the organisation's ability to manage stakeholders in an equally dynamic manner: disequilibrium, as defined by various chaos perspective experts, also applies to the organisation's definition of its relationships with stakeholders.

The critical lesson organisations should keep in mind is that of continuously observing the underlying patterns of occurrences in relation to the transformational process from afar: it would seem that the divide between "real" managerial problems and the potential of the chaos perspective may be

overcome when organisations are viewed as whole entities, and when traditional strategies are flexible enough to anticipate and accommodate the demands from the dynamic environments. The means through which organisations can engage with stakeholders are dialogue and scenario planning. Finally, the role of the Corporate Communication division may rather be the facilitation of such dialogue and corporate values than only mechanistic communication programmes.

7.2.2 Empirical conclusions

7.2.2.1 Objective 2: The purpose of Affirmative Action

Three conclusions that pertain to corporate values, terminology and approach to the process are presented in relation to this objective. Firstly, corporate values influence the manner in which organisations approach the management of AA. South African organisations implement AA measures as part of EE strategies and as a means to bring about an equally representative workforce. The spirit of the EEA and BEEA are appreciated and incorporated into the corporate values of organisations. The notion of “reversed discrimination”, as suggested by De Beer and Radley (cf. 2000) is not a motivating factor.

The implementation of an EE strategy is not a matter of legal compliance either, which highlights organisations’ awareness of their role or place as responsible corporate entities, as suggested by the King Report II (cf. 2002). This awareness of their role in (contribution to) societal development may stem from the fact that corporate reputation in relation to this area is extremely important. The current focus on the so-called tripple bottom-line (cf. Post *et al.*, 2002) and the manner in which organisations have to report on their achievements (cf. King Report II, 2002) may also contribute this sense of corporate responsibility.

Secondly, the terminology that organisations use to manage the process reflect both the corporate values and the evolution of Government’s approach to this process. “Affirmative Action” is not used. The fact that employees still hold strong negative emotions about that concept, confirms that organisations should indeed manage EE matters from the perspective of appreciating diversity. When organisation’s sense of responsibility within society is considered, it is not co-incidental that they also support the appreciation and development of their employees. The management of diversity is

favoured as the approach that will bind employees together instead of again creating a psychological division.

The reactions toward "AA" further suggest that ten years since the first democratic elections, is perhaps a very short period for people from all races to truly grow beyond the fear/resentment that divided them previously – a fact that supports De Beer's (cf. 1998) interpretation about the challenges that ordinary people would face.

7.2.2.2 Objectives 3 and 4: Strategic value of communication (An integrated approach from within and across cases)

Four conclusions are presented in relation to objective 3. The first is the fact that differences exist between the views of the three designated individuals per se, as well as across three cases. As was indicated previously, the specifics of an organisation's approach to AA, determines the focal point of the views each of these designated individuals has about the strategic value of communication. These facts confirm the suitability of a multiple case study design in relation to this exploratory study, as described in Chapter 5.

Secondly, communication is central to the transformational process. Agreement exists about the importance of communication in both the internal and external contexts, which confirms the theoretical relationship between transformational change and change communication: transformation cannot come about without communication. The notion of communication as a vehicle for transformation, as suggested by the myriad of authors in both Chapters 2 and 4, is also confirmed. Communication is viewed as the means for sharing information and meaning, as proposed in Chapter 1.

Thirdly, internally, communication predominantly serves the purpose of conveying details about the corporate programme for the implementation of AA to all employees. Thus organisations are fulfilling their obligation to "inform and consult" as suggested by the Code of Good Practice for the EEA (1999). And other departments also expect the Corporate Communication function to advise them on the appropriate management of communication in this context. The underlying principle of Grunig's (cf. 1992) role conceptualisation of expert prescriber and/or advisor is thus relevant in this context.

Finally, external communication serves the purpose of informing stakeholders about progress with the process. The management of corporate reputation falls within the realm of external communication, while organisations recognise both the opportunities and threats of such communication. The overarching view is that external communication about false achievements in the area of EE is a risk. This fact confirms that the broad or national approach to the management of EE is complex: political pressure exists in many forms and has a definite influence on whether organisations are perceived as responsible corporate citizens, if only by virtue of complying with legislation.

7.2.2.3 Objective 5: Key role players

A number of “key role players” are involved in the management of EE, at both strategic and tactical levels. Both departments, different levels of leadership and individual organisational leaders have a responsibility for managing communication (or the flow of information) about AA in South African organisations. At departmental level, both the Human Resources, Corporate Communication and EE departments have central roles in the process. These departments are responsible for corporate strategy initiatives, either in their specialist areas or in an integrated manner. When viewed from the chaos perspective, the challenges for organisations are apparent: The fact that the aforementioned departments and leaders are so central to this process suggest that organisations rely on traditional, linear modes of thinking, but paradoxically, also have to rely on the expert opinions from the three departments. Du Plooy-Cilliers (cf. 2001 & 2003) and Ströh (cf. 1998) emphasise the paradoxes that emerge from this perspective.

7.2.2.4 Objective 6: Key responsibilities of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners

Three conclusions are presented in relation to objective 6. Firstly, the three interviewees in each case study have corporate responsibilities in relation to the EE process. The role of the Human Resources, Corporate Communication and Employment Equity departments in the process of implementing affirmative action measures, implies that the most senior practitioner in each of these departments, also have communication responsibilities in this context. Two levels of responsibility exist, namely corporate and departmental. Corporate responsibilities refer to (but is not limited to) the dissemination of information about the process, including the business and moral imperatives, and the organisational vision for Employment Equity.

Secondly, departmental responsibilities refer to (but is not limited to) setting numerical EEA targets; setting an example for others as a leader; addressing fears and concerns from designated and non-designated groups; disseminating information about the process, and facilitating dialogue about the process. From these facts it appears as if the Code of Good Practice for the EEA (1999) does influence the manner in which organisations manage the EE process since the aforementioned dimensions are all embedded in the code. These facts also confirm the value of the Code for Good Practice for the EEA (1999) and the model for integrated thinking by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) as benchmarks for South African organisations since they cover all aspects of the process.

Finally, the line between communication for legal compliance and communication for corporate transformation is rather thin. The conceptualisation of EE strategies as transformational change (as defined by Anderson and Ackerman Anderson, cf. 2001, as well as Grobler in Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003) was supported by the empirical evidence in all three cases. The core values of all three organisations were affected in preparation for such strategies, while the success of this process further depends on current (or evolving) corporate culture and values.

7.2.2.5 Objective 7: Contribution of the Corporate Communication function

Conclusions about two aspects are presented. Firstly the Corporate Communication function is expected to provide tactical and strategic advice. Secondly, organisations are not satisfied with the manner in which internal communication about EE matters is managed.

Corporate Communication departments are expected to provide advice regarding technical and communication strategy dimensions to the Human Resources and Employment Equity departments irrespective of the type of organisation. The role of this department would ideally not be to initiate communication about this organisational effort, but to be involved right from the start of the development of an Employment Equity strategy or plan.

However, in two of the three organisations this department is seen as having neglected internal communication in favour of external communication. The management of corporate reputation is largely viewed as strategically more important, and perceived as such by those who complain about this disparity. Activities/achievements in the arena of EE and BEE as important for corporate reputation management. Internal communication is important for the transformational effort, but the importance of

the external environment, as suggested in figure 7.2 (section 7.4), may be explained by the commercial survival of organisations. These facts again highlight the difficulty of balancing the interests of different stakeholders and responsible corporate citizenship, as discussed in section 7.2.2.2.

7.2.2.6 Objective 8: Communication responsibilities of other departmental leaders

Legal compliance guides the range of responsibilities that leaders currently have in this transformational context. But the evidence also highlights the thin line between strategic (business) imperatives and legal compliance, one of the overarching themes that emerged from the study. All the responsibilities that were reported in relation to this objective in Chapter 6, confirm that the leaders in organisations are in fact held to the responsibilities as formulated in the Code for Good Practice for the EEA (1999).

The interrelatedness of communication and managerial responsibilities was also emphasised. Organisations still conceptualise transformational leadership in a rather narrow or mechanistic manner: leaders are predominantly responsible for information dissemination within hierarchical structures. This practice reflects the ideas by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) about traditional leaders in this transformational context. The “knowing, doing, being” perspective is not widely supported, but depends on the corporate realities or needs. On the other hand, some aspects of the chaos perspective on leadership are embraced by individual interviewees and/or divisions. Only organisation formally supports self-directed leadership through the philosophy of empowerment.

7.2.2.7 Objective 9: Content for internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders should be, and are currently, informed about the moral and business reasons for implementing affirmative action as part of the EE strategy. The communication of these reasons depends on the specific values that govern each organisation. The purpose of internal communication would be to facilitate the transformational process associated with an EE strategy: all employees ought to embrace the process as non-negotiable and a natural phenomenon in the workplace. However, traditional sentiments against or in favour of such measures still need to be addressed. Finally, the technical details of the process in organisations, together with progress reports, are also communicated to all levels of employees. This process is also hierarchical in all organisations, with some elements of the chaos perspective noticeable, as indicated in the previous section.

Content for internal stakeholders thus seem to reflect more than the minimum requirements, as required by law, as indicated in the EEA (55/1998) and the Code for Good Practice for the EE (1999). The complex nature of this transformational context is also reflected in these facts: the unique organisational dynamics will influence what messages will be used in order to bring about individual transition, as suggested by French and Delahaye (cf. 1996).

7.2.2.8 Objective 10: Content for external stakeholders

The information that external stakeholders receive is not different from the information that internal stakeholders receive. However, the advent of the EEA and BEEA have influenced the relationship organisations forge with external stakeholders, and which hinges on communication. Since organisations need to monitor equity in their business ventures, including dealers, supplier and contractors, these traditional external relationships have been re-defined as "internal".

Such stakeholders are often provided with exactly the same information as employees, which still constitute the traditional internal stakeholder grouping. The suggestions by Post *et al.* (cf. 2002) regarding the need for a new appreciation of stakeholders in a turbulent environment are thus also validated. The notion of incorporating the principle disequilibrium in relation to stakeholders as part of a conceptual framework, thus seems realistic.

7.2.2.9 Objective 11: Content analysis of communication strategy

Organisations value communication strategies in this transformational context. Communication strategies serve the traditional (deterministic) function of aligning messages and the specific contributions of divisions and/or individuals. All dimensions of Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework for a communication strategy are reflected in the strategy that was already in place at one of the organisations.

7.3 OVERALL COMPARISON OF CASES

Corporate values and culture determine the manner in which organisations approach the management of communication in this context. External communication efforts are currently managed more strategically than internal communication, thus causing frustration among Communication experts. EE

committees are also central to the success of the facilitation of information and feedback about EE matters. The Corporate Communication division is not the leading department in this context since this transformational context is more directly associated with the policies and processes from the Human Resources and Employment Equity functions. However, these three divisions co-operate in this transformational effort. Finally, communication is the key ingredient in the transformational process.

7.4 HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE RESEARCH PHENOMENON

The description of theoretical and empirical conclusions would not be complete without a summative view on the research phenomenon, i.e. communication about Affirmative Action within the context of Employment Equity, in the South African context. Such a view is presented as a means of summarising the key aspects from the previous chapter and the preceding conclusions. These ideas are illustrated in figure 7.2 (on the next page).

Evidence in relation to the four sub-questions further suggests that transformational change management is articulated by means of communication (in different guises). As was indicated previously, the ultimate purpose of the empirical investigation was to provide an exploratory answer to an overarching question and not only specific objectives. Thus four sub-questions need to be answered as part of the answer to the overarching research question.

The evidence confirms that organisations' transformational change efforts cannot come to fruition without the management of transformational change communication and transformational leadership. However, as was indicated previously, the exact manner in which the aforementioned sub-systems contribute to the achievement of the transformational vision, is unique in each organisation. The interrelatedness of transformational change, transformational change communication and transformational leadership is confirmed by figure 7.2

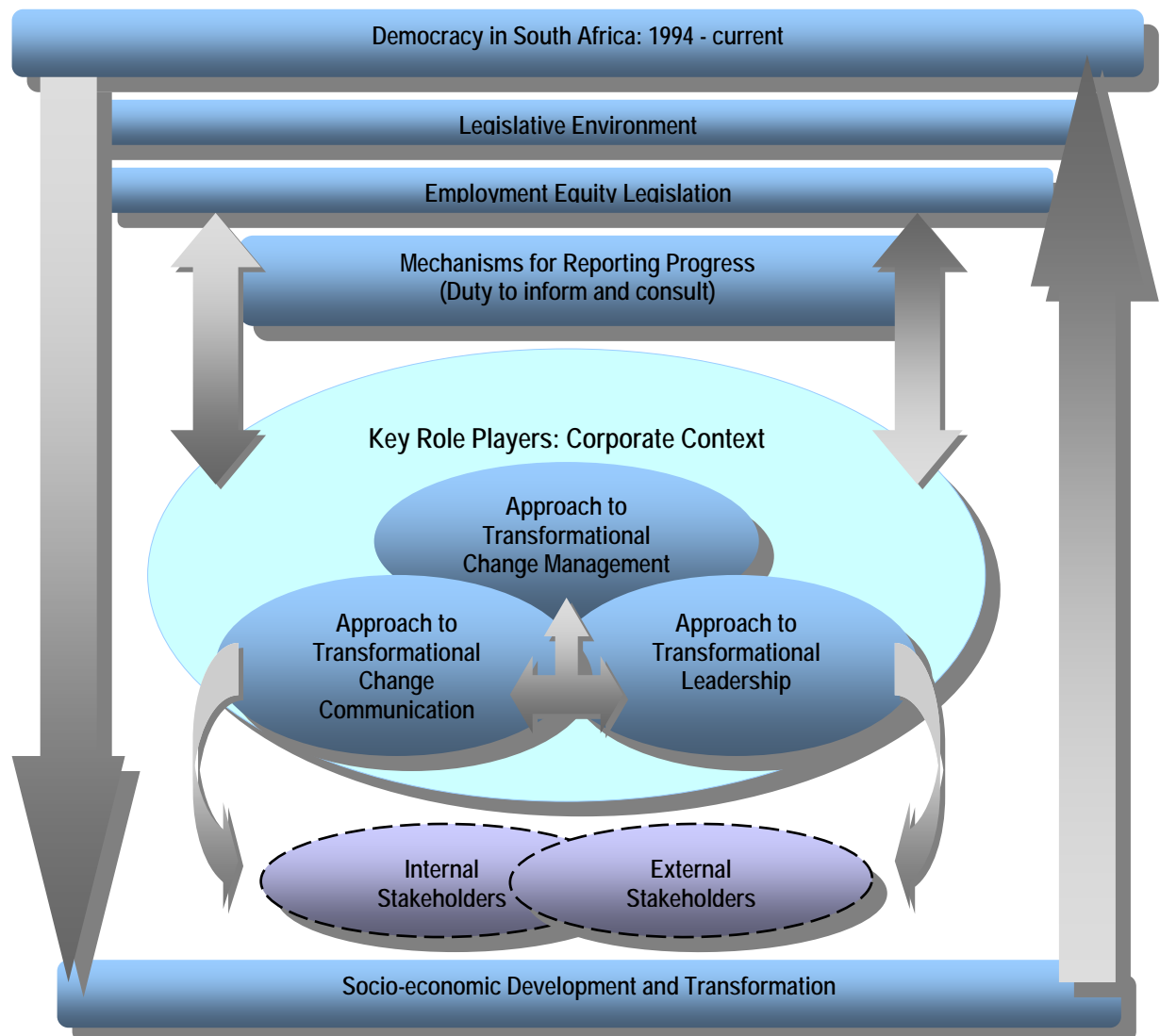
7.4.1 Duty to inform and consult with stakeholders

Legislation is enforced by different mechanisms related to the Department of Labour, primarily the Code of Good Practice for the EEA (Department of Labour, 1999b). Organisations implement EE strategies for legal compliance and adhere to the minimum requirements in relation to their duty to inform and consult with stakeholders, including structuring the mechanisms for the process.

Communication flows in all directions, thus serving the purpose of information and consultation. However, unique organisational complexities determine to which degree diachronic or synchronic communication (as defined in Chapter 1) occurs.

Figure 7.2

A holistic view of communication about Employment Equity



7.4.2 Approach to Employment Equity as a transformational change process

The implementation of EE strategies is unequivocally viewed as a transformational change process. The transformation that needs to take place in organisation is that of values that should lead to tolerance between different races, and specifically the acceptance of those employees who had previously exclusively owned and/or worked in the formal business sector. Race is the predominant

element in this process although gender issues were mentioned in the passing. But EE is also viewed as critical for the development of society and the transformation of organisations to reflect the diverse corporate philosophies. Most importantly, BEE is viewed as the overarching motivation for implementing AA measures.

7.4.3 Approach to the management of communication about Employment Equity

Communication is predominantly managed as a result of organisation's strategic business and compliance objectives. These two areas are interrelated and a factor that complicates communication efforts: balancing the interests of internal and external stakeholders depends on the unique realities within each organisation. The legislative process is continuously influenced by the socio-economic development of society as well as party-politics. The boundaries between internal and external stakeholders are increasingly blurred.

7.4.4 Approach to leadership within Employment Equity as a transformational process

The first level of responsibility for communication in the transformational context lies with key role players that make corporate and departmental decisions. Traditional levels of management are critical to the dissemination of information and leadership in relation to the process: leadership is predominantly defined as a "doing" process, while other, more advanced dimensions of leaders do not receive much attention.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are presented in relation to specific objectives, thus also contributing to the holistic understanding and future management of this transformational process.

7.5.1 Conceptual framework for the management of communication about Employment Equity

The conceptual framework for managing communication about EE matters may be utilised in order to reconcile the assumptions of the chaos perspective and the transformational needs of organisations. The six principles that form the basis for transformational thinking, as indicated in Chapter 4, are the

understanding of communication as vehicle for transformation, corporate culture transformation, dialogue with stakeholders, organisational learning, leadership and strategic alignment. Any future communication strategy should encompass these dimensions, while also serving the purpose of aligning all communication efforts with the corporate strategy, while corporate leaders should be fully aware that this process cannot be successful without “thinking” critically and continuously. Corporate and/or communication strategies should, however, not remain the exclusive property or responsibility of the Corporate Communication department or even the other two prominent departments. All departments should live the principles on which such strategies are based.

The key principle of the conceptual framework is flexibility (adaptability). Evidence from the case studies suggest that the environment within which organisations define themselves, stakeholders and then manage communication, is indeed turbulent or sometimes outright unpredictable. One of the most senior Communication practitioners referred to the dramatic impact a sudden change in Government’s approach to the process of EE target-setting would have: “If they would suddenly change from target-setting to prescribed quotas, I would instantly have to delete 90% of everything I currently have on my PC.” (This comment was made after the completion of that particular interview.)

7.5.2 The purpose of Affirmative Action

As was indicated in the previous section, all actions pertaining to the transformation effort should be based on a set of well-defined and well-known corporate values. The transformational vision should form the background for the “alignment” and mobilisation of the entire organisation. But these values must accommodate the philosophy of diversity in the South African context in order to steer away from further racial divisions. Finally, corporate values need to be co-created by all involved in the organisation. The most logical starting place would be the assessment of an organisation’s place in society. Dialogue about this matter and the corporate values should be continuous in order for all employees to internalise and participate in the creation of such values.

7.5.3 Strategic value of communication

Organisations should attempt to manage internal communication as a strategic priority within this context. The reason for this recommendation is the criticism from some of the participating organisations about the current external focus of communication about EE or BEE matters, while

internal stakeholders are the constituencies that need to live through and bring about the transformation in organisational climate in order for affirmative action to be implemented successfully. As was explained earlier, the growing importance of reputation management has contributed to the current external focus.

The real challenge lies in balancing the interests of internal and external stakeholders – a dilemma that is arguably as old as the notion of “responsible” business. And although a traditional response to this dilemma might be that “structures should be put in place to address the problem”, a more sustainable solution appears to elevate the status of internal communication from the management of publications and the intranet, to strategic contributions.

One solution for this situation may lie in a communication strategy: a strategy may overcome the perceived gap between internal and external communication. But the need for reconciling the ideas of the chaos perspective should govern the approach to strategy formulation and implementation, as suggested in the conceptual framework that was mentioned previously.

External communication should be managed strategically, taking into account the potential risk to corporate reputation about achievements in the arena of EE or BEE. External communication should not be limited to press agency activities. Such changes may only occur when the potential contribution of the Corporate Communication function is re-evaluated – refer to 7.5.6.

7.5.4 Key role players

So-called “key role players” cannot take the full responsibility for the success of the transformational effort. All employees should value the diversity of colleagues and be empowered to deal with the challenges of possible uncertainty about job security or career development. It would perhaps be too idealistic to propose that all organisations start supporting the philosophy of self-directed leadership in order to make employees less dependent (psychologically) on traditional leaders, but it is encouraging that several South African organisations are developing unique and advanced leadership models. The philosophy of empowerment should remain within the theoretical realm.

Empowerment should be a core value and effectively tied to the approach organisations will follow in the management of communication, or information. Key role players, either individuals or departments

would still have certain responsibilities as proposed by legislation, but these would act more like “observers of the whole process” than “controllers at micro level and the protectors of information”. The integration of efforts would far better serve the purpose of corporate transformation than silos and ego-boosting efforts.

7.5.5 Key responsibilities of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners

As was mentioned previously, specialised expertise poses a paradoxical challenge. Instead of limiting these three designated individuals to traditional responsibilities, either corporate or departmental, they could be employed as the core team of the corporate transformation strategy, related communication strategy, communication programmes, facilitation of corporate values and the empowerment of all other employees. However, communication between these three individuals and their divisions should be elevated from interactions about tactical matters to strategic thinking. The benefits of pooling such expertise are self-evident.

7.5.6 Contribution of the Corporate Communication function

As was implied in several preceding sections, this function needs to function on both the strategic and tactical contributions, as well as creation of corporate values and stakeholder management. This function should perhaps only provide tactical advice to other departments regarding the execution of message management, while providing strategic advice regarding stakeholders. Government relations and the involvement of organisations in the formulation of BEEA charters for each sector (industry) should be a critical focus area for this function.

Other areas in which this department may contribute strategically include internal and external environmental scanning; communication and conflict resolution training for all leaders; as well as a reputation management strategy in order to address the issue of being “the preferred employer”. Such a strategy would have to extend beyond mere publicity – it would have to be based on the sustainability of EE in the working environment and organisations.

7.5.7 Communication responsibilities of other departmental leaders

A more advanced understanding of leadership needs to be integrated with the “practicalities” of this transformational effort. The dimensions of “knowing, being and doing” should be a standard approach to leadership development. Such an approach should transcend the mechanistic notions of “content and effects”. Leaders should be honed to be *transformational leaders* in the true sense of the word, thus also accepting responsibility for the success of the corporate transformation effort.

7.5.8 Content for internal stakeholders

Three broad categories should be communicated to internal stakeholders. These categories are equally important. Legal compliance dictates that the details about EE matters are shared with employees. The implications of the EEA on Human Resources policies need to be clarified per organisation, thus highlighting the need for strategically managed internal communication. The last category is communication in relation to the creation/facilitation of corporate values.

As was indicated previously, a climate should be created within which this transformational process can come to fruition. All employees should be enabled to contribute to these values on a continuous basis since transformation is an infinite process. Once again, the emphasis should not be on formal structures to facilitate employee inputs, but rather a culture of dialogue. Finally, the achievements in the EE or BEE arena should be shared with employees prior to external communication efforts, if at all possible. Employees need to understand the whole picture, successes and failures, in order to comprehend their potential role in the process.

7.5.9 Content for external stakeholders

Corporate profiling should be the strategic concern in relation to this transformational effort. However, the potential risks about communicating for the purpose of quick fix publicity gains, should be considered very carefully. Individual organisations are at risk, as well as the broader EE process. Rather, all corporate profiling efforts should be aligned with the transformational vision and based on the management of relationships with external stakeholders. Once again, the organisation should focus on the dynamic nature of the legislative process, issues and stakeholders. Environmental scanning and scenario planning should be two further critical components of the transformational strategy.

7.5.10 Communication strategy formulation and implementation

Communication strategies could serve to help organisations negotiate their way through the maize of possibilities and challenges. Alignment should be based on the six principles described in section 7.5.1. The manner in which Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) have integrated the contents as required by legislation with the process of transformational change management, could serve as benchmark for South African organisations. Finally, the underlying requirement for communication strategies should be flexibility through which organisations will be able to keep up with ever-changing demands from the external environment and organisational conditions.

7.6 LIMITATIONS

7.6.1 Theoretical limitations

The phenomenon of **transformational/change communication**, does not seem to be well-researched and/or documented. This limitation posed a challenge: possible solutions for the management of communication in relation to affirmative action as a transformational change phenomenon had to be sought in the form of a conceptual framework, as described in Chapter 4. In attempt to overcome this challenge, the aforementioned theoretical work was formalised as the first objective under section 1.5 in Chapter 1.

7.6.2 Empirical limitations

High-quality qualitative case study research requires that the researcher only exits an organisation (case) when all the sources of evidence have been exhausted. However, the exploratory nature and specific objectives of this study were the main considerations in opting for the design that was described in Chapter 5.

Secondly, the interpretations of evidence in relation to the theoretical description of the organic worldview may be contested. The interpretation of clues pertaining to the different approaches to the transformational process and change communication was complicated by the fact that no standardised set of indicators of either deterministic or organic approaches was utilised.

The last limitation pertains to the transferability of the results. The exploratory nature of the research limited the number of cases studies to four, one of which served as the pilot study. The results of this study cannot be generalised to all large South African organisations. The results may, however, contribute to the better understanding of the research phenomenon in the sectors (industries) that participated in the study, i.e. municipalities and the automotive industry.

7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations pertain to the manner in which this study may be replicated or extended, as well as topics that seem to justify further research.

7.7.1 Empirical recommendations

Four recommendations are proposed: Firstly, the study may be replicated, but by means of a panel interview with the three interviewees. This would improve the process of making connections between the major themes since interviewees would, like in a focus group, be able to yield richer responses to the interview questions and comments from one another.

Secondly, a future study should include a focus group discussion with the different EE committees/forums. Responses from such a discussion would serve as the last element in the communication loop, i.e. a perspective from other role players that need to convey the messages about EE matters. More importantly, these committees/forums are central to the management of formal feedback about the process, an element that was not adequately pursued in the current study.

Thirdly, the so-called approaches to transformational change management, including the management of change communication, could be researched by means of explanatory (causal) studies.

Finally, future studies may benefit from the inclusion of more than three organisations and/or organisations that all represent different sectors/industries.

7.7.2 Research topics

Four research topics deserve further attention: Firstly, research could be conducted to test the validity of and refine the conceptual framework for the management of communication about EE that was described in Chapter 4. Results from such research could contribute to the body of empirical evidence regarding the chaos perspective on change and transformational change management.

Secondly, the impact of the BEEA may be researched from various perspectives associated with the field of Corporate Communication: The manner in which organisations manage a broad spectrum of external stakeholders could be a specific topic in this field of study.

The relationship between reputation management and BEEA measures could be also be researched. The last area for future research lies in the potential of managing communication in a fully integrated manner, which will encompass functions like Marketing, Human Resources and Corporate Communication.

The manner in which organisations manage the process of transformation may also be recorded in order to compare different frameworks for communication, policy formulation and legal compliance. Action research could perhaps be most useful to practitioners who are in search of answers in relation to the age-old question of “best practices” in this context. However, results of such research should not be mistaken for the only perspective on the matter since the knowledge of practitioners and academics should ideally contribute to the continuous evolution of this “thinking science”.

7.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

People and communication are pivotal in the management of corporate transformation in relation to Employment Equity in the South African context. The contextual demands of Employment Equity are unique: the type of individual and group transformation required, is radically different from cyclical or incremental changes. Individuals and organisations need to bridge the psychological chasm between the core values of Apartheid South Africa and reconciliation between all races – a paradigmatic challenge that will arguably never be repeated.

Negative sentiments and emotions abound on this transformational phenomenon, thus highlighting the need for deeper understanding of transformation, communication and leadership. And it is appropriate that an interviewee has the last word about the matter:

“In this process you will see growth – that is important to me. Communication in this transformation effort ... there can just not be anything better. It brings in a breath of fresh air ... it brings in life.”