

CHAPTER 6

VARIABLES OF IMPORTANCE IN THE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The dependent variables in this study, namely work-related values, locus of control and leadership behaviour have been discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The independent variables of importance when studying value and leadership-related research, will be discussed in this chapter. Based on a literature study, 8 independent variables have been selected to explore the relationships between the dependent variables, namely the six work value dimensions of the Survey of Work Values (Wollack et al, 1971), the four value dimensions of Hofstede (1980), internality, and leadership styles. The main variables which may influence the dependent variables are gender, age, home language, religion, level of education, occupational level, ethnicity and years of work experience.

In Chapter 2 a brief cultural overview of the unique composition of the SA population was provided in order to enhance a proper understanding of the urgency to analyse and understand firstly, the multitude of differences underlying human behaviour in SA organisations and, secondly, the impact of this workforce diversity on organisational life in general and leadership behaviour specifically. This chapter will further explore the variables within this workforce diversity. It is expected that the independent variables referred to above, may all have an important bearing on work values expressed by different groups in the South African work environment as well as on leadership and follower behaviour in general.

The concept “nuisance variable” will also be discussed as well as the control thereof.

6.2 MAIN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

6.2.1 GENDER

Since 1994 the process of dismantling gender domination in the South African workplace has developed hand in hand with the process of racial affirmative action. Women are now considered to have the right to compete with their male counterparts on an even basis and many companies already show a much more representative workforce in terms of gender, also in the senior

managerial and leadership ranks. The process also enjoyed considerable attention in the South African National Defence Force.

Men and women are reported to be equal in terms of memory, learning ability, creativity, reasoning ability, and intelligence (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1998: 28-42), but because men and women are treated differently, gender differences might impact on social and value related studies. Due to the impact of religion and culture on gender role stereotypes (i.e. men are breadwinners and women take care of the household) and the way people are socialised in South Africa, researchers may also be biased in terms of assumptions, stereotyping and prejudice concerning gender groups.

Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnely (2000) confirm that there is no evidence that men are better job performers than women or *vice versa*. However, this does not mean that the two groups are equal in terms of worldviews and value orientation and still need to be respected and valued for their differences in this regard. This study focuses on those variables influencing effective leadership behaviour and, if differences in work-related value orientation do exist between gender groups, these differences may also have an impact on the way leaders prefer to influence follower behaviour. Differences as such are not what is important for this study – the researcher is rather interested in how these differences influence the effectiveness of follower performance and satisfaction.

The question as to whether gender differences do account for differences in leadership styles and behaviours has occupied the attention of many researchers over the past few decades (Hennig & Jardin, 1977; Sargent, 1981; Nieva & Gutek, 1981; Hall, 1984; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johnson, 2000). Leadership findings generated in experimental settings established leadership styles to be gender stereotypic (Eagly et al, 2000:56). These findings concur with the generalisations that male and female leaders often differ in experimental settings (Brown, 1979; Hollander, 1985). Women's leadership styles were found to be more democratic than those of men, even in organisational settings. Eagle et al (2000: 56) ascribe these differences to underlying differences in female and male personalities or skills or other subtle differences in the status of men and women who occupy similar organisational roles.

Leadership-based research (Bass et al, 1994) has firmly established the fact that leadership styles differ in terms of follower effectiveness. These researchers indicate that higher levels of participation and both leader and follower involvement lead to higher levels of follower performance, satisfaction with the style, and extra effort. The opposite was found to be true for those leaders following a transactional and autocratic approach. This can easily lead to a belief that women, being more democratic than men, are more effective in influencing the performance of followers. However, whether men or women

are more effective leaders as a consequence of their differing styles, is a complex question. Even though in recent years many behavioural consultants and theorists have criticised traditional management practices for being overly hierarchical and bureaucratic (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Bass, 1990; Handy, 1991), Eagle *et al* (2000) remain unwilling to argue that women's relatively democratic and participative style is either an advantage or disadvantage. This unwillingness stems mainly from the numerous barriers being faced when doing leadership investigations, i.e. the fact that the environments in which managers carry out their roles are diverse, even within the same organisation. Kent & Moss (2000: 45) argue that, while past research has consistently shown that men more often emerge as leaders than women, some of the barriers in terms of social acceptance that prevented women from emerging as leaders, are indeed coming down. In fact, the results from the study of Kent *et al* (2000) show that women are slightly more likely to emerge as leaders than men. Whether men or women who do emerge as leaders are more effective in terms of follower behaviour, remains an issue for further debate and research.

6.2.2 AGE

Leader behaviour is shaped and formed, amongst other forces, through learning from firstly, the resultant behaviour of followers, secondly, formal leadership development and thirdly, observing the behaviour of other significant leaders. This process takes place over time, implying that age could be regarded as another independent variable which may have an influence on leadership research results. There seems to be a firmly held expectation that leadership experience leads to more effective leadership (Fiedler, 2000: 147).

Similarly, time (and therefore age) seems to have the same influence on the forming of values and organisational culture. Hofstede (1980: 345) found that differences in values among respondents of different ages may be due to what he refers to as "maturation" and "zeitgeist". Maturation refers to the fact that respondents' values shift as they grow older. Certain shifts are due only to the aging of respondents. Zeitgeist effects occur when drastic changes in conditions cause everyone's values to shift, regardless of age. "Generation" is also used as a term indicating that certain values are fixed in the youth and then stay with their age cohort over its lifetime (Hofstede, 1980: 345).

Theron (1992) regards employment stability as a function of the average age of its incumbents – the older the more stable. Despite this view, the SANDF focuses on establishing a younger, healthier and fitter organisation through the implementation of various shorter-term employment options.

6.2.3 LANGUAGE

Arguably the most important element of effective leadership behaviour is the ability to verbally communicate with those being led. Most evidence suggests that leadership in essence is a relationship that exists between two or more people in a social setting (Stogdill, 2000: 30). Through communication, amongst other factors, the leader influences the behaviour (performance) of followers. Transformational leadership requires leaders to continuously interact with and inspire followers to higher levels of performance.

Similar to numerous other factors associated with the “struggle against apartheid” the Afrikaans language was also seen as a mobilising and unifying force of the white minority. While multilingual communication is probably the normal practice of daily life for most South Africans (Goduka, 1998), linguistic diversity did not receive the respect it deserved under the system of apartheid. All indigenous languages were undervalued, especially with regard to education, and English and Afrikaans were accepted as the only official languages. Adam & Moodley (1986: 44) point out that blacks did not have a single unifying African language and that languages such as Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho were used as a medium of resistance, “a secret underground code” during the struggle for equality, but it never became the language of material success. Today black students prefer to be educated in English, but still without giving up their linguistic heritage.

The domination of Afrikaans and English as official languages has since 1994 been changed to equal status for all languages. However, English remains the dominant medium of all public and private communication. With eleven official languages being recognised, the use of different languages in the work place has become so problematic that English has again become, to a large extent, the accepted business language. Against the background of the indigenous black languages not being recognised and accepted as official languages for many decades, the challenge for workers and employers to work together more effectively and productively in the same work place of today is becoming increasingly demanding.

6.2.4 RELIGION

The important role of religion in shaping cultural values, and therefore individual and group behaviour was already referred to in Chapter 3. Investigating the differences between Western and African religion will contribute much to understanding the huge array of clear, non-ignorable cultural differences underlying human behaviour in SA organisations. Man’s religion and life perspective determine cultural views, values and behaviour (van der Walt, 1997: 4). Man’s culture cannot be separated or isolated from religion – religion forms an inherent facet of cultural differences.

Religious diversity has for many years been part of South African history especially on the socio-political scene. Theron (1992:302) notes that religion has played a decisive role in South Africa in the mobilisation for ethnicity. Beliefs and values associated with apartheid were (and are even still) seen as part of the Christian religion and value system. Many blacks regard Christianity as the origin of discriminatory beliefs and practices. This is a result of Afrikaner nationalism having achieved its political goals through a skilful manipulation of its symbolic resources, e.g. language and religion. Giliomee and Schlemmer (1989) refer to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) with its strong Calvinist orientation as being responsible for giving Apartheid its religious basis.

Van der Walt (1997: 83-122) offers empirical evidence that both the new socio-economic-political situation and the deeply rooted religious life-viewing factors are busy influencing and determining the cultural identity of young South Africans. While in the past the policy of apartheid defined what people would be and whom they were allowed to have contact with, South Africans today have to start defining themselves again and determine who they want to be. He warns that, in this process, people should realise that cultural differences are not only found up to skin depth, but that the being under the skin (also the deeper spiritual being) should be recognised and appreciated. It should also be kept in mind that Christianity is not a Western religion *per se* and that everyone has the freedom to choose his own religion. However, the way in which religion (i.e. Christianity) is practised differs from one culture to the next. A relationship with God offers a good example. Based on the over-emphasising of the community, Africans see a relationship with God as a common or communal relationship. In the case of Western people the opposite is found: based on the emphasis on the individual, a relationship with God is viewed as individual and personal, it presupposes an individual choice. Cultural values therefore, also determine how a certain religion is practised.

6.2.5 EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Theron (1992) refers to the close relationship between educational level and years of schooling and points out that data about education levels may be less accurate than data about years of schooling, as education systems vary from one country to another and also from one ethnic group to another. Similar to many other areas of racial separation in South Africa, the National Party, in its strive towards Afrikaner Nationalism¹, instituted an education policy of Christian National education, founded in the fact that education should be based on the Bible. In this system religion was linked to education to foster the maintenance

¹ The political expression of shared ethnic consciousness, or politicised ethnicity (Adam *et al*, 1986: 13)

of desired value systems. A system of Bantu education was also initiated; a system that rejected preparation for incorporation into industrial society and one that has led to immense dissatisfaction among black people. They regarded this education system as second class, deliberately designed to give them inferior training. Hanf, Weiland & Vierdag (1981:274) describe the education system as evil and a symbol of the hated system of apartheid. Owing to a lack of proper schooling facilities, black schools have been overcrowded, which necessarily lowered the quality of teaching and increased pupils' fears for the future.

The South African schooling system has, since 1994, been transformed into a system offering equal opportunities to all, focussing on narrowing the immense educational gap that was left due to the prior discriminatory schooling and tertiary education practices. As a result more and more blacks today find themselves equipped to compete at all levels in the labour market. Betlehem (1988: 224-225) highlights the importance of delivering the necessary schooled manpower through an advanced education system in order to ensure continuous economic growth in South Africa. It can only be achieved if this education and training is relevant and realistic.

With regard to the role of work-related values, Hofstede (1980:124-127) reports that the power distance dimension has an effect on educational systems. Although PDI² and average years of formal education were found to positively correlate, the important aspect of education is not only a matter of the number of years at school or the number of students. What is taught (and how) is equally important. For example, in a high PDI environment (like South Africa) where children are more dependent on parents, students are found to be more dependent on teachers. Hofstede (1980: 126) also warns that the relative number of top educated scholars for any country is less crucial than the educational level of those making up the middle strata in society.

6.2.6 OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL (RANK)

Noticeable differences with regard to occupational level still exist in South African society. Smit *et al* (1999) reports that less than 2% of top and middle management were black and that only a handful of blacks had managed to establish themselves in managerial and executive positions. It is clear that whites still dominate many professional, managerial and other skilled positions. Blacks still form the bulk of semiskilled and unskilled labour. This unrepresentative situation is slowly being addressed and changed through

² Inequalities in power as formalised in boss-subordinate relationships are referred to as Power Distance. Subordinates will try to reduce and bosses will try to maintain or enlarge the level of power distance. The level of power distance at which both tendencies find an equilibrium is expressed in a Power Distance Index (PDI) (Hofstede 1980: 92).

correcting measures such as affirmative action, bridging training and fast tracking.

Hofstede (1980: 105) reports that occupational level is associated with the value dimension “uncertainty avoidance” in the sense that stress differences are related to occupation. He also finds that lower education and lower status occupations tend to produce high PDI values, while higher education and higher status occupations produce low PDI values.

Hofstede (1980: 345) points out that seniority and age effects are not easy to separate. His research results indicate that seniority and age are correlated across individuals between .52 and .76 with a median of .61. The values of both senior and older people were found to be more stable than those of junior and younger employees.

In the SANDF seniority is indicated by means of a military rank system consisting of non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and officers. More senior posts are associated with more senior ranks. The flexible service system (FSS) in terms of which employees had expectations of life-long employment, fostered growing rank-age discrepancies and resulted in the development of the so-called Core Service System (CSS) as part of the HR Strategy 2010, in terms of which a large component of young, fit and healthy personnel should supply the bulk of operational requirements, with a smaller core component of professional military personnel and a very small component comprising top leadership and management. The bulk of the junior and middle level leadership and management cadre will serve in the CSS, which will represent the second career stage (after the Military Skills Development System or MSDS) of members serving in the SANDF.

The SAAF has already developed a “young profile”: 65% of all members are younger than 30 and 81% are younger than 40 years of age. Other than the SA Army, the SAAF does not carry significant numbers of combat personnel whose effective deployment potential is restricted due to age. Although the SAAF focuses on creating a young, fit and healthy force, HR strategy developers are well aware of the fact that most SAAF deployments require skilled combat personnel with extensive experience that is related to years in service.

6.2.7 POPULATION GROUP

In Africa, social research studies could easily be biased in favour of the perspectives of white male researchers who have done most of the research up to date. Conducting social research should never fail to take into account the unique perspectives of various racial and ethnic groups.

In discussions about human differences, the terms race and ethnicity are both used when referring to characteristics of groups of people (Mark, 1996: 58). Confusion exists regarding the differences between race and ethnicity, but it is clear that they do in fact refer to different things. According to Robertson (1981: 281) race refers to “the genetically transmitted physical characteristics of different human groups whereas ethnicity refers to “culturally acquired differences”. He defines race as “...a large number of people who, for social or biographical reasons, have interbred over a long period of time; as a result, they have developed identifiable physical characteristics and regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as a biological unity”. For social researchers, beliefs about race have great importance, especially in the (South) African context. Many people have stereotypical beliefs that persons who share particular physical features (i.e. dark skin) also share other particular characteristics. People are then treated based on their membership of a certain physical group. The discriminatory practices against black Africans serve as a good example.

Ethnicity also refers to characteristics of human groups. While race refers to biographical characteristics, ethnicity refers to culturally acquired differences such as language, religion and a sense of common historical heritage. An ethnic group is then defined as “...a large number of people who, as a result of their shared cultural traits and high level of mutual interaction, come to regard themselves, and to be regarded, as a cultural unity” (Robertson, 1981: 282).

When doing culture-sensitive research one should always recognise the fact that it is not always possible to study certain ethnic issues objectively as different cultures represent different conflicts in values. Sohng (1994) proposes four principles for conducting culture sensitive research:

- There is no single explanation that will adequately account for the situation of all cultural groups. Researchers should therefore rather search for more explanations reflecting the divergent perspectives of all the people involved.
- When studying the behaviour of particular ethnic and racial groups, researchers should also investigate how the behaviour fits into the rest of society. The influence of societal institutions and values on different ethnic groups should be recognised.
- Researchers should value the diversity and richness of social problems and life situations found in different ethnic cultures.
- Researchers should use “ethnic reasoning”. The term refers to the use of questions such as “whose point of view does this research favour?”

6.3 NUISANCE VARIABLES

Variables are defined as characteristics of persons, objects, groups or events to which qualitative and quantitative values can be assigned. These values can also be categorical (Mason & Bramble, 1989: 68). The definition of De la Rey (1978: 11) is more comprehensive: "...any psychological attribute, quality, characteristic or feature, or norm of judgement on which people tend to differ". Variables must have the ability to differentiate between people. Research can only be successful if observed changes in behaviour can be attributed to what is called the Independent Variable. When the nature of one variable (say, Y) depends on the value of another (X), X is referred to as the independent variable and Y the dependent variable.

It is often found that, due to practical considerations, it is not possible for a psychologist to control all factors that may negatively influence the results of the research. Variables that may have such an effect on research findings are referred to as nuisance variables and De la Rey (1978: 12) warns that it would be unwise to ascribe perceived behavioural changes only to the influence of the independent variable. Nuisance variables (also known as covariates) may intervene between independent and dependent variables by affecting the direct relationship between them. In these situations psychologists try to control the variables which may contaminate and obscure the research results. If the control of these nuisance variables is impossible during the planning phase of the research, the intervening variables can be controlled statistically by means of analysis of covariance (Theron, 1992: 300).

Psychologists try to control the effects of nuisance variables in order to minimise the contamination of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Mason *et al*, 1989: 68). In a trivariate analysis the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable is examined under each condition of the third (nuisance) variable. Tabachnick and Fidell (1983: 14) refer to this analysis as an analysis of variance where one or more nuisance (or extraneous) variables are included in addition to the independent variables and a single dependent variable to statistically test the effect of covariates as a source of variance in the dependent variable.

In the research design the researcher will ensure the control of possible nuisance variables in order to ascertain a true result of the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The independent variables applicable to this study were discussed in this chapter. In terms of biographic diversity South Africa seems to be a very special case. Major changes in the composition of the SA work force have

occurred over the past decade, also with regard to the emergence of senior black leadership in many organisations. Much evidence of a country having been successful in overcoming a history of stereotyping people in all spheres of society can be found. The chapter provided a brief overview of the multitude of differences underlying human behaviour in SA organisations.

As stated earlier, when analysing the nature of leadership behaviours and the factors influencing these behaviours in an African context, one continuously has to bear in mind that “African” is not just different to “Western”, but that the term in itself represents a huge variety of cultural groups. In addition, the fact that the SA population also includes a significant Western (mostly white) element, cannot merely be ignored. It is widely accepted that the country should continuously seek to move towards a society characterised by ethnorelativism where the potential and value in terms of organisational performance of all groups and cultures are regarded as inherently equal.