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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# **Choir participation as tool for transformation and teambuilding in a corporate environment: a case study within Absa Bank**

**Alta van As**

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**University of Pretoria  
Department of Music**

**Supervisor: Prof Caroline van Niekerk**

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**To my Mother and Father**  
**With great appreciation**



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for initiating and establishing a wonderful choir project  
and allowing me to execute this investigation;**

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**At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:**

**“Glory to God in the heavenly heights,  
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him”**

**(Peterson 1993:141)**



## Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	v
<b>1. Orientation to the study</b>	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Personal motivation for the study: a reflection	3
1.3 Research questions	4
1.4 Aim of the study	4
1.5 Research design	5
1.5.1 The opportunity	5
1.5.2 Relevant knowledge	5
1.5.3 Observing and analysing data	5
1.5.4 Evaluating	6
1.5.5 Evidence	6
1.5.6 Limitations and delimitations of the study	7
1.5.7 Value of the study	7
1.6 Research methodology	8
1.6.1 Research methods used	8
1.6.2 Collecting the data	12
1.6.3 Sampling	14
1.6.4 Interventions	15
1.6.5 Interviews	15
1.7 Further chapters	17
1.8 Notes to the Reader	19



<b>2. Literature review</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Transformation	21
2.1.1 What is “transformation”?	21
2.1.2 Transformation in a South African context	22
2.1.3 Change theories	26
2.1.4 Culture	29
2.2 Ubuntu	31
2.2.1 Ubuntu defined	32
2.2.2 Ubuntu and opportunities for informal interaction	36
2.2.3 Ubuntu and the workplace	37
2.2.4 Ubuntu, racism and nation building	39
2.3 Social Capital	40
2.3.1 Forms of capital	41
2.3.2 Social Capital: origins	44
2.3.3 Conceptualising Social Capital: Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam	45
2.4 Teambuilding	52
2.4.1 Defining “team”	54
2.4.2 Types of teams	56
2.4.3 Team roles	59
2.4.4 Teambuilding/group development theories	61
2.4.5 Critiques of teamwork in the workplace	64
<b>3. Why choir?</b>	<b>67</b>
3.1 Eminence of choral singing in South Africa	67
3.2 Singing: reasons and outcomes	69
3.3 Choir participation and transformation	73
3.4 Findings of the 2008 WSI choir survey	76

<b>4. Absa and the Absa Internal Choir Festival</b>	<b>85</b>
4.1 Absa Bank: a synopsis	85
4.2 Origins: a journey of change	86
4.3 Absa in the South African context	87
4.4 Absa and the Absa Internal Choir Festival	88
4.5 Absa and the Absa song	90
4.6 Absa Internal Choir Festival: passion and commitment	95
4.7 The DVD	97
<b>5. Interpreting the data</b>	<b>100</b>
5.1 Introduction	100
5.2 Section A: Background information	101
5.3 Section B: Factors	107
5.3.1 Factor 1 - Fun (FUN)	110
5.3.2 Factor 2 - Proudly Absa (PABSA)	116
5.3.3 Factor 3 - Cultural Diversity (CDIV)	122
5.3.4 Factor 4 – Teambuilding (TBUILD)	128
5.3.5 Factor 5 - Improving cross-department collaboration (CDEPT)	134
5.3.6 Factor 6 - Absa does indeed view its staff as its “most important Asset” (MIMPAS)	140
5.3.7 Factors 1-6: Summative data	145
5.4 Section C: qualitative data	147
<b>6. Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>160</b>
6.1 Conclusions	162
6.2 Recommendations	167



**Reference list**

170

**Appendix 1: The Questionnaire**

**Appendix 2: Index of Chapter 5 graphs and tables**

**Appendix 3: Supplementary DVD**



## Abstract

Fourteen years into democracy, South Africans yet need to transform into a truly united society. Transformation entails meaningful change and requires new mindsets, behaviours and worldviews. In this country, such change hinges on interaction and communication between all South Africans to facilitate insight into the unfamiliar lifeworlds and beliefs of others.

In 2005 Dr. Steve Booyesen, Group Chief Executive of the Absa Group, initiated an internal choir festival as a platform for social interaction and team building of staff across all cultures, age groups and post levels in the bank. This happened in the process of the Barclays Bank investment of billions of rands that would translate to its controlling share in Absa. Recognising the merge as a potential threat to the morale of the Absa work force, Booyesen envisaged the choir project as a means to support staff during this phase of transformation in the bank.

This study links theories relating to organisational development and the inherent power in music and musicking for positive change. The questionnaire (administered in three interventions between 2006 and 2008) was the primary instrument for obtaining data for this study. Absa's choir project (the first of its kind in South Africa and possibly elsewhere in the world) offers unique possibilities for investigating the positive effects of musicking, and in particular choral singing, within a corporate environment. For optimal functioning, societies rely on their citizens to trust each other and share a civic culture. With the exception of the Indian community, choral singing is a practised tradition across all cultures in South Africa and thus presents a possible vehicle to promote healing and nation building in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Genuine communication between citizens from all cultural backgrounds could help liberate South Africans of superficial prejudgments of each other. Where the inability to speak the others' language(s) inhibits authentic communication, choral singing proffers



unique opportunities for shared communicative experiences. Should choral singing prove to be an appropriate key to unlock such experiences for South Africa of differing cultural and language backgrounds, then choral singing is of great value to this society.

Keywords:

- Change
- Choir participation
- Communicative practices
- Corporate songs
- Social capital
- Team building
- The Absa Group
- Transformation
- Ubuntu

## Chapter 1

### Orientation to the study

#### 1.1 Introduction

In 2005, Dr. Steve Booyesen, as Group Chief Executive of the Absa Group, the biggest banking corporation in South Africa (previously the *Amalgamated Banks of South Africa*), initiated the Absa Internal Choir Festival - an endeavour for all interested Absa employees. This happened in the wake of the Barclays investment of billions of rands that would translate to its controlling share in Absa. Recognising the Barclays merge as a potential threat to the morale of the Absa work force, Booyesen envisaged the choir project as a tool for team and spirit building for Absa employees during this phase of transformation in the bank.

On the topic of Mergers and Acquisitions, Claire Gordon-Brown (2005:47-51) observes:

It is the people issues, more than the process issues. Processes themselves don't have emotions that have to be dealt with. People do, and this is what makes them more complicated ... it is about people at the end of the day ... and often companies do not understand their feelings, fears and aspirations.

Booyesen saw the choir project as an opportunity for Absa employees, across the full scope of cultural, ethnic and language diversity, to participate collectively in a stress-releasing, bonding pursuit. The Absa Internal Choir Festival further presented a channel for embracing the “bigger Absa family” and the Absa brand on a personal level, in the midst of the Absa-Barclays merger. Ashkenas and Francis (2000:108-116) state that a successful integration manager is someone who:

- is emotionally and culturally intelligent, understanding that Mergers and Acquisitions affect people's lives and
- has the ability to (amongst others) bridge gaps in culture and perception.

The author would argue that through the initiation of this project, Booyesen distinguished himself as just such a manager.



The Absa Internal Choir Festival plays out in an authentic South African multi-cultural corporate context and as such it is particularly significant in the present-day South Africa. During the apartheid era, separate development policies necessitated differentiation on the grounds of language and culture in a multi-linguistic country rich in cultural diversity. Apartheid segregation laws fostered great isolation of the separate communities in the country. In the business world hardly any opportunities existed for the different ethnic and language groups to work together on equal grounds. Opportunities to develop understanding of and appreciation for ethnic and cultural differences were scarce. These factors propound particular difficulties for meaningful interaction, let alone actual teambuilding, in the workplace.

Businesses worldwide invest mammoth amounts in corporate teambuilding endeavours. Towards the end of the 2005 project, Dr. Booysen and the top management of Absa were of the opinion that the success of the project exceeded all expectations. It was decided to repeat the process until such time when Absa employees would indicate a lack of interest in the Absa Internal Choir Festival. 'Such time' has not yet come. The fact that Absa has invested and continues to invest millions of rands in their choir project is collateral to suggest the success of the project to date, and indeed, the benefits of choir participation to the ordinary employee.

Set in a context of a broader South African society in need of authentic transformation and unity, the Absa Internal Choir Festival could propose a model for fostering societal harmony, thus ensuing improved societal wellbeing, through the practice of choral singing. The complexities of racial and cultural diversity are not unique to this country. Robert Putnam, prominent international academic and social capital theorist, points to the serious implications of ever-increasing ethnic and cultural diversity worldwide - an outcome of the current global rise in immigration.

It will be worthwhile clarifying if the perceived benefits of choir participation could be converted in a meaningful and ultimately financially profitable way for organisational development re transformation and teambuilding in the corporate environment. The Absa Internal Choir Festival offers a unique opportunity for such an investigation.

## 1.2 Personal motivation for the study: a reflection

In the many years of working with choirs in South Africa and elsewhere, I have come to believe that participating in a choir has beneficial results for the individual on social, emotional, cognitive, creative, aesthetic and psychosocial levels. The importance of the development of musical understanding through choral singing and training as well as the magnitude of its widespread benefits has been an interesting subject for me over years of involvement in music education training. My keen interest in the subject of choirs, choral training and specifically the multi-faceted benefits of choral singing for non-music specialists has been developed through many years of involvement in this discipline.

In 2005 I was first commissioned by Absa to write a ‘corporate song’ (Absa song) for the Absa Internal Choir Festival. Based on the role of this song in the success of the 2005 project, I have been invited to compose similar works for the Absa Internal Choir Festival, 2006-2009. The beneficial nature of music, and more specifically choir singing, is generally accepted amongst musicians and their industry. During the 2005 Absa Internal Choir Festival, I personally witnessed the power of choral singing as a means for developing team spirit and transformation in the Absa choirs – made up of non-music specialists in the corporate world. This reinforced my belief in the benefits of choir participation for the ‘everyday man’.

The success of the Absa Internal Choir Festival has been accepted on the grounds of instinctive perception. Showing evidence of the extra-musical benefits of choir participation for employees in a corporate setting will enhance and improve the perceived value of music for the broader society. This study aims to establish the viability and sustainability of such a project in a financially-driven corporate world.



### 1.3 Research questions

The main research question on which this study is based is:

How and to what extent can choir participation be a successful tool for accomplishing transformation and teambuilding in a corporate environment like Absa?

Sub-questions:

- Based on current theories of the concepts, what is the meaning of transformation and teambuilding in a post-Apartheid South African society?
- To what extent are the values presented by the African philosophy of Ubuntu reaffirmed through choral singing and the Absa Internal Choir Festival?
- How does the process of developing an Absa choir link up with the concept of social capital in a corporate South African context?
- Which elements inherent in choral singing could be contributing factors to attaining extra-musical outcomes?
- To what extent does the Absa Internal Choir Festival achieve the outcomes envisaged from its introduction?

### 1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the efficacy of choral singing as a tool for teambuilding and transformation in a corporate environment. The results of the research on the Absa Internal Choir Festival should indicate whether such projects could be extended to the broader corporate world and general South African society in need of transformation and unity.



## **1.5 Research design**

The Absa Internal Choir Festival affords a platform for the validation of the value of music-making practices, and specifically choir participation, to the ordinary worker in the corporate world.

### **1.5.1 The opportunity**

This study deals with the experienced impact reported by participants of the AICF, affording the author, as a music educator, the opportunity to validate the value of participation in music-making in a much broader context than that which is normally associated with music education (school based curricular and extra-curricular music activities and private instrumental training).

### **1.5.2 Relevant knowledge**

The focus of this study necessitated the investigation of a spectrum of fields that are not normally associated with traditional music education research. Minimum understanding of theories relevant to the context of the investigation - such as transformation, change theories, social capital, Ubuntu and teambuilding - needed to be established for interpretation of the process and outcomes of the Absa Internal Choir Festival.

### **1.5.3 Observing and analysing data**

This study was totally dependent on the goodwill and cooperation of Absa. A banking giant like Absa is obviously underpinned by hierarchical structures, which need to be understood (not a simple task for an outsider) and respected. Absa managers are busy people and responsible for the successful operation of business procedures of the bank: the bank must make money and the clients and shareholders must be satisfied with its performance. Research access to the organisation was thus dependent on their belief that some commercial advantage can be derived from the research, and that confidential

issues would be respected as such. The research process therefore had to be carried out with great sensitivity re the above factors.

Every step of the actual investigation intruded, to some degree, on the procedures of the Absa Internal Choir Festival. This posed a number of challenges to the planning of collecting data:

- Understanding acceptable procedures as well as preferences within Absa;
- Respecting and accommodating procedures, preferences and requirements of Absa management so as to avoid the study being seen as an unnecessary problem in a business environment where the main objective is that of doing business;
- Showing consideration for the sacrifice of personal time and energy required to participate in the Absa Internal Choir Festival, such as practicing and related activities, when arranging interviews and/or completing of questionnaires; and
- Being sensitive to the apprehension (observed) on the side of management of possible negative impressions (of Absa) that could be created, should the outcomes of this study indicate that there were not sufficient benefits for participating Absa employees.

#### **1.5.4 Evaluating**

The outcomes of all planned investigational processes (questionnaires, formal and informal interviews) are compared to concepts and theories found in the mentioned fields that relate to this research project. Evidence is analysed and arranged in a way conducive to clarity and the verifying of conclusions drawn from the obtained evidence.

#### **1.5.5 Evidence**

Absa employees participating in the Absa Internal Choir Festival, external service providers and other observers (members of audiences and adjudicators at the different choir competitions) acted as the informants/providers of evidence. This study recognises



the challenge in gathering information and evidence that favourably compares to the quality and scope of the concepts underpinning the different related subject areas.

### **1.5.6 Limitations and delimitations of the study**

The Absa Internal Choir Festival is an official Absa project and the author was therefore obliged to respect all boundaries set by Absa. Gathering the large range of information for this project, in its diverse fields and disciplines, should ensure appropriate understanding to ask the relevant questions and be confident to interpret the answers in a meaningful way.

This study is rooted in music – investigating the capacity of choral singing for facilitating transformation and teambuilding. However, an adequate theoretical framework to the study needs to be founded on a comprehensive examination of non-music fields related to the context of the Absa Internal Choir Festival – the human capital of Absa Bank. Through the multi-disciplinary nature of the research, this music educational study will aim to establish an understanding of the fields related to transformation and teambuilding. The focus of the study is human development *through* music. Analyses of the music (choral works) sung in Absa’s choir project will not be endeavoured in this study.

### **1.5.7 Value of the study**

Establishing the success of the Absa Internal Choir Festival project, as a tool for corporate teambuilding and transformation, would improve the perceived role of music in the corporate world. Further, this could promote the use of choral singing to facilitate meaningful transformation in the broader South African society. The spin-off of this success could be beneficial to the music industry and possibly generate a larger monetary investment in music.

## 1.6 Research methodology

This investigation of the Absa Internal Choir Festival was predominantly a quantitative research project (numerical data obtained from measurements of counting). Questionnaires were used as the main instrument for data collection. However, to obtain authentic findings in a survey of a multi-faceted phenomenon such as the Absa Internal Choir Festival, it was clear that triangulation (applying a combination of several research methods to the study of the same the phenomenon) was to be an essential requirement.

Views on triangulation include:

Gathering data on the same topic through a variety of means is a way of validating research findings through triangulation. Concepts do not wave red flags and denote their significance to the re searcher (Somekh and Lewin 2005: 50);

[An] attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint (Cohen and Manion 1986: 254); and

[Triangulation] gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation (Altrichter et al 1996:117).

### 1.6.1 Research methods used

For the purpose of drawing a more balanced and detailed picture of the Absa Internal Choir Festival, quantitative as well as qualitative research methods were applied.

- **Quantitative research**

In quantitative research, data is obtained from measurements of counting. Sampling techniques, such as surveys, are used and the findings can be expressed numerically (statistically). Specifically appropriate to the Absa Internal Choir Festival survey, Kuhn (1961:180) notes:

When measurement departs from theory, it is likely to yield mere numbers, and their very neutrality makes them particularly sterile ... But numbers register the departure from theory with an authority and finesse that no qualitative technique can duplicate, and that departure is often enough to start a search.

Sections A and B of the questionnaire provided the quantitative data for this study. The statistics obtained through the above suggest that the surprisingly positive outcomes of the Absa Internal Choir Festival survey could be accepted as valid.

- **Qualitative research**

In qualitative (phenomenological) research, meaning is “... socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world ...” (Merriam and Associates 2002:3). In the instance of this study, the word “world” specifically refers to the participants’ interaction with:

- The choir as a group;
- Fellow members of the choir of differing backgrounds (cultural or otherwise);
- The process of the Absa Internal Choir Festival; and
- The employer or the brand (Absa).

Phenomenological qualitative research deals with questions about “... common, everyday human experiences ... believed to be important for our time or typical of a group of people” (Merriam and Associates 2002:97). In this study, ‘group’ refers to the group of participants in the Absa Internal Choir Festival and their experiences of the project. Richard Wolf suggests that phenomenology

... focuses on lived experience. It looks at people’s experiences of phenomena and how the experiences are structured, focusing the analyses on the perspective of the individual experiencing the phenomenon (Merriam and Associates 2002:97).

The following was used as a guide when developing qualitative questions for interviews and questionnaires:



<b>Phenomenological Paradigm</b>
<b>Basic beliefs</b>
The world is socially constructed and subjective
The observer is part of what is observed
Science is driven by human interest
<b>Researchers should</b>
Focus on meanings
Try to understand what is happening
Look at the totality of each situation
Develop ideas through induction from data
<b>Preferred methods include</b>
Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
Small samples investigated in-depth and ideally, over time

(Adapted from Shaw et al 1999: 12)

The literature review explores a range of concepts related to the Absa Internal Choir Festival. The study further incorporates action research, descriptive research methods, historical research methods as well as narrative inquiry.

- **Literature review**

According to Charles (1988:184), literature related to the main question of a study is reviewed in order to determine three things:

1. Whether studies already exist that are similar to what one proposes to undertake;
2. Whether existing research provides guidance or sheds further light on the problem; and
3. Whether existing research provides a point of departure or a platform upon which the new research can build.

The literature survey across the disciplines relevant to this investigation has a three-fold function:

1. To orientate the Absa Internal Choir Festival within current South African context;
2. To gain the necessary insight regarding these subject areas for competent interpretation of the Absa Internal Choir Festival and data of the survey; and

3. To provide a sound information base for the above (Chapters 2 and 3).

The literature review on transformation, teambuilding, social capital and Ubuntu (Chapter 2) confirmed that South African society still needs to embrace the promise of the Rainbow Nation. Chapter 3 investigates the prospect of choral singing to facilitate such a process.

- **Action Research**

The social basis of action research is involvement; the educational basis is improvement. Its operations demand changes. Action research means ACTION, both of the system under consideration, and of the people involved in that system. System can mean any human social order – factories, airlines, services, schools – and people means all personnel, not just the managers, for in a democratic system the smallest part will affect the overall shape of the whole (McNiff 1988:3).

Through composing the Absa songs, training the Absa choirs, assisting and advising conductors and organisers, the above criteria have been met re social and educational bases of action research.

- **Historical and descriptive research**

This was an important source of gathering information needed for Chapter 4.

The purpose of both historical and descriptive research is to *describe* - and afterwards to interpret – present and past situations, conditions, events and trends. This satisfies our innate need to know and, in addition, provides a basis for speculating on why things were as they were, or are as they are. Interest in both historical and descriptive research is strong, even when there is no practical payoff, because it informs us about topics of interest and helps us anticipate future events (Charles 1988: 82).

- **Narrative enquiry**

This research method involves gathering information for research through what can be described as storytelling. According to Phillion (2002:268), most narrative enquiries are strongly rooted in the autobiographical. Phillion (2002:107-108) explains the four directions in any narrative enquiry as:

1. Inward: directed towards feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions;
2. Outward: directed towards the environment;
3. Backward: directed towards the past; and
4. Forward: directed towards the present and future.

### **1.6.2 Collecting the data**

The questionnaire was the main instrument for collecting data in this survey. Every question in the questionnaire was developed with direction and consent from the Absa Internal Choir Festival project manager and the Human Resource department in Absa.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections, A, B and C. Quantitative data was gathered through sections A and B while qualitative data was obtained through section C.

- **Section A (Questions 1-7)**

In this section questions are aimed at obtaining information on respondent background re age, gender, ethnicity, home language, region and post level. This provided information needed to establish the demographic profile of the Absa Internal Choir Festival. Additionally, the information obtained through this section provided grounds for comparison of perceptions of choral singing held by different groups (such as male versus female).

- **Section B (Questions 8.1-8.45)**

This section aimed at obtaining insight into each respondent's opinions and experiences re the Absa Internal Choir Festival. To assess the value of the choir project to Absa, the study needed to establish whether the choir project facilitates the development of factors that are important to the company in regards to their staff. Absa identified six factors for this purpose. Each factor was investigated through six to eight questions (posed as statements) relating to different components/facets of the particular factor. The Absa Internal Choir Festival is accessible for all Absa staff. As employees from all post levels participated in this project (from tea ladies and cleaners to managers), which represented a wide range of literacy competencies, the questionnaire had to be user-friendly to all. A decision was made to include only positive statements to minimize misunderstanding and confusion which could encumber authentic representation of participant experiences and perceptions.

Based on themes/factors developed with AICF and Absa Human Resources management, the questions/statements were developed around the following themes/factors:

- **Proudly Absa (PABSA)** - Has this project instilled an increased sense of corporate pride?
- **Cultural Diversity (CDIV)** - Through participating in this project, did participants perceive they had benefited from this teambuilding and transformation initiative?
- **Teambuilding (TBUILD)** - Through participating in this project, did participants perceive they had benefited from this teambuilding and transformation initiative?
- **Improved Cross-departmental collaboration (CDEPT)** - This factor relates to the sub-question on teambuilding and transformation.
- **Absa does indeed view its staff as "its most important asset" (MIMPAS)** - Does this project instil in employees a sense of being valued as important individuals?

The following Likert scale options were provided in order to simplify the process of answering questions:

<i>1 =msd</i>	<i>I most strongly disagree</i>	<i>2=sd</i>	<i>I strongly disagree</i>
<i>3=d</i>	<i>I slightly disagree</i>	<i>4=a</i>	<i>I slightly agree</i>
<i>5=sa</i>	<i>I strongly agree</i>	<i>6=msa</i>	<i>I most strongly agree.</i>

- **Section C (Questions 9-11)**

In this section three open ended questions were given to allow respondents to give their views on personal impressions and experiences in the Absa Internal Choir Festival:

9. List in order of priority the three most important obstacles your choir encountered in the process of building your choir;
10. List one greatest achievement of your choir; and
11. Please indicate the single greatest benefit to you personally by participating in the choir.

### **1.6.3 Sampling**

In 2006 the sample for the first intervention consisted of choirs from seven of the ten Absa regions: Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Gauteng North, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape. For the second intervention the questionnaire was administered to all members of the final ten choirs, representing all Absa regions: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Gauteng-North, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West and Western Cape. In 2008, during the period between the semi-finals and finals, choir conductors/organisers were asked to select a representative sample of twelve to fourteen respondents per choir to reflect the composition of their choir re age, ethnicity, gender and post-level in bank. One choir per South African province was engaged: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern



Cape, North West and Western Cape. This amounted to a much smaller sample than was used for intervention one or two.

#### **1.6.4 Interventions**

The questionnaire was administered in three interventions. Interventions one and two took place in 2006. In the light of the overwhelmingly positive results of intervention one and two, a decision was taken to once again administer the questionnaire as a means for triangulation of the data outcomes. The purpose for this intervention was to substantiate whether 2008 Absa Internal Choir Festival participants perceived their choral experience in an equally positive way as 2006 participants conveyed in intervention one and two. This could ascertain if sustainable success of the choir project exists over time.

Interventions through questionnaires took place as follows:

- First intervention (I1): before the 2006 regional Absa choir competitions;
- Second intervention (I2): during the last two days of the 2006 final national choir competition;
- Third intervention (I3): before the 2008 final.

#### **1.6.5 Interviews**

Structured and unstructured interviews were a further source of information. Interviews were conducted on a continuous basis. Initial interviews with Absa management were crucial in order to:

- Establish a working relationship between the researcher and the bank;
- Obtain relevant information about Absa's choir initiative for both the questionnaire and the study in general;
- Gain an understanding of the perceived aims and role of the AICF; and
- Gain insight into the corporate hierarchical structures relating to the AICF in the bank (Absa).

Ongoing interviews (structured/formal as well as informal) were conducted with the following informants/sources:

- Dr. Steve Booysen – Group Chief Executive and initiator of the Absa Internal Choir Festival;
- Annemarie Mostert – Absa Internal Choir Festival project manager;
- Members of Absa management;
- Members of audiences at competitions;
- Selected Absa Internal Choir Festival participants suggested by management.

In *Finding your way in qualitative research*, Henning provides examples of “Intermediate Questions” (2004:158), which served as a guideline for the planning of interview questions.

Questions for structured interviews:

1. What is your position in Absa?
2. What has your role been in the Absa Internal Choir Festival?
3. What was your initial response when you were first introduced to the concept of an internal Absa choir competition?
4. Please explain if your perceptions changed regarding the benefits of choir participation for transformation?
5. In relation to teambuilding, what have you observed in the development of the Absa choirs?
6. In your opinion, what were the challenges for participating in the choir project?
7. Please describe any positive outcomes of the Absa Internal Choir Festival.
8. Would you welcome another choir festival/competition in the future? Please motivate.

The perceptions of Absa choir members as well as Absa management, reflected in the questionnaire and interviews, provided an extensive impression of the Absa Internal Choir Festival.

## **1.7 Further chapters**

### **Chapter 2 Literature review**

This chapter aspires to establish an understanding of:

- 2.1 Transformation, and specifically as relating to the current South African context;
- 2.2 Ubuntu, as an influential African philosophy;
- 2.3 Social Capital; and
- 2.4 Teambuilding.

Theories of the above concepts will serve as a standard to evaluate the meaning and merit of choir participation through the Absa Internal Choir Festival against.

### **Chapter 3 Why Choir?**

Schoen (1940:87) notes that poets have sung for ages about the power of music over the emotions “to stir, soothe and inspire”.

More than six decades later, in a 2006 world-first study, a group of Australians travelled to New Orleans and used choir singing to help ease the effects of post-traumatic stress in the wake of hurricane Katrina. “People [involved] now see the choir as a way of uplifting themselves and raising themselves, and making new friendships, understanding how other people have been affected and how they can help each other” (Simkin 2006).

This chapter investigates the suitability of choral singing to facilitate social change in the South African context:

- 3.1 Eminence of choral singing in South Africa;

3.2 Singing: reasons and outcomes;

3.3 Choir participation and transformation; and

3.4 Findings of the 2008 Winter-Summer Institute (WSI) choir survey.

## **Chapter 4 Absa and the Absa Internal Choir Festival**

Through interviews (with role players in Absa management, the Absa Internal Choir Festival team and external service providers) as well as historical and descriptive research, a brief look will be taken at:

### **4.1 The Absa Group**

Information on the origin of Absa, its history of mergers and transformation, vision, values, and role in social upliftment role in South Africa will be presented.

### **4.2 The Absa Internal Choir Festival**

The origins, planned outcomes, process and management of the choir project will be described. The relation of the history, vision, missions and branding to the choir project will be discussed.

### **4.3 The role of the Absa song as a branding tool**

According to Macauly (2005:76), “branding” is another key issue for successful M&As:

Each company has its own brand. Its people identify with this brand and many of them have chosen to work for the company because of this brand. In an M&A environment they do not know what the new brand will stand for and whether they will like what it stands for.

The process, music and messages contained in the 2005-2008 Absa songs will be discussed. DVD recordings of these compositions will be provided. A DVD, capturing

revealing moments, events and interviews of the 2005-2008 AICF processes, is included in this study to afford an enhanced impression of the subject of the study

Chapter 4 concludes with an orientation and overview of the supplementary DVD.

## **Chapter 5 Interpreting the Data**

In this chapter the outcomes of qualitative data are illustrated through graphs. Where appropriate, clarifications are included. Outcomes of quantitative and qualitative data are discussed.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study concludes with a summary of the findings of this research project. Recommendations, based on the findings of the investigation of choir participation as a tool for transformation and teambuilding, are suggested.

### **1.8 Notes to the Reader**

- Absa refers to their choir project as the Absa Internal Choir Festival (henceforth referred to as the AICF). However, this festival operates as a competition. Each year the objective of this festival is to identify the best Absa choir in the country through provincial and finally a national competition. In 2008 Booysen (DVD: Scene 5) repeatedly refers to the project as the Absa Internal Choir Competition. On these grounds the title of the supplementary DVD refers to *Absa Internal Choir Competition*;
- In South Africa Absa is referred to as *Absa* and also *Absa Bank*. The holding company is *Absa Group*;
- In a number of instances page numbers are not provided in references given in the text due to the use of internet research, or articles obtained from authors.



## Chapter 2

### Literature review

The title of this thesis indicates the investigation of choir participation as a means to advance *transformation* and *teambuilding* in a corporate milieu such as Absa. At the outset, this chapter aspires to establish a common understanding of *transformation*, *teambuilding* and the efficacy of choir participation for the advancement of transformation and/or teambuilding in the workplace. To this end, evidence of the beneficial nature of music, and more specifically *choir participation*, is examined. Current literature is reviewed to reveal the gist of:

- 2.1 *Transformation* as *change* in South African society;
- 2.2 Possible indicators posted by *Ubuntu*, as an influential value system in South Africa, for meaningful transformation;
- 2.3 *Social capital* in the workplace; and
- 2.4 *Teambuilding* as pertaining to the AICF.

### 2.1 Transformation

Much is currently said and written about transformation in every sphere of South African life.

#### 2.1.1 What is “transformation”?

Universal connotations to the term convey implications of a process of changing position or consciousness; a paradigm shift; a translation/conversion into an alternative form. Definitions of the term include:

- Qualitative change; a transmutation; a shift (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language 2006);

- A complete change, usually into something with an improved appearance or usefulness (The Encarta World English Dictionary 2008);
- In an organisational context, a process of profound and radical change that orients an organisation in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness (BusinessDictionary.com 2007-2008).

In all its applications, *transformation* is a noun referring to a verb. Contrary to *transformed*, *transformation* implies an ongoing process – always continuing, yet always applicable in the now: an in-progress phenomenon. The term points to the future, anticipating and even creating future competencies. Cebrowski (2002) indicates that transformation deals with “...the co-evolution of concepts, processes, organizations and technology” and that change in any one of the areas infuses change in all. He further states that transformation is meant to “... identify, leverage and even create new underlying principles for the way things are done”, thus identifying and leveraging new sources of power. Transformation is a vital part of life itself; we are unavoidably born into this continuous route of evolution.

Transformation unavoidably implies *change*. In the work environment, the employer needs to identify the kind of change desired and provide strategies for employee engagement to accommodate the processes needed for this desired change to occur. To avoid failure, the nature of the tactics implemented must be dictated by the nature of the change needed. Anderson and Anderson (2001:39-48) note that while change management can effectively support developmental and transitional change, it is “woefully insufficient” for transformational change. It is critical to understand the type of change the organisation is going through in order to determine if traditional approaches can be functional to abet the needed change. They distinguish between three types of organisational change:

*Developmental change* focuses on improving current business procedures which can include existing skills, methods, standards and conditions through improved sales/quality, interpersonal communicational training, team development and problem-solving efforts. *Transitional change* is evident in simple mergers or acquisitions, creation of new

products or services and implementation of new IT or other programmes in the organisation. The aim of the change can be pre-determined and therefore fully managed. This type of change only impacts people at levels of skills and actions, and not at the more personal levels of mindset, behaviour and culture.

*Transformational change* is by far the most challenging. There can be no clear picture of the end result (future state) and therefore the process of change in this case cannot be managed with

... predetermined, time-bound and linear project plans. The actual change process must emerge as you go. Furthermore, the future state is so different from the current that the people and the culture must change in order to be able to implement it. This requires new mindsets and behaviors and often all involved need to shift their worldviews in order to invent the required new future, let alone effectively operate in it (Anderson and Anderson 2001:40).

Transformation of the individual is affected by transformation of his/her world. Since 1994, South Africa has been a country in the process of transforming itself. South Africans are familiar with this term which is woven through most discourses dealing with the fabric of our society. To quote but one early example:

I want to begin by emphasising the pressing need for transformation in our country. As we are all aware, Transformation is one of the great challenges facing our country (Bengu 1997).

### **2.1.2 Transformation in a South African context**

While it is not the intention of this research to become entangled in the *political* discourse on transformation in South African community, it cannot fail to notice that, in this country, the term seems sentenced to be coupled (loaded) with racial issues inflicted on our society by Apartheid ideologies. It would be an act of imprudence to make light of the impact of Apartheid thought on our perceptions and related emotions and behaviour in 2008. Recent events of racism in South Africa have again highlighted the reality of the shortcoming of transformation in our “Rainbow nation”: the so-called “Walg video” at



the University of Bloemfontein and the Federation of Black Journalists' (FBJ - founded in post-Apartheid 1996) exclusion of white journalists at an address by ANC president Jacob Zuma. In June 2008 the scandalous wave of xenophobic attacks that swept through the country accentuated once more the inadequacy of "transformation" in South African society.

In South African daily life, *transformation* typically refers to an adequate number of black employees/managers/players in an organisation/sports team, or lack thereof. However, the possibilities which transformation holds should not be limited to mere implications of redressing our past in public/formal structures. Common and much debated terms equated to *transformation* in South Africa are Affirmative Action, BEE (Black Economic Empowerment), Equity and 'ratios'. The destination/outcome for each of these has been determined in detail and authorities strive to manage the process. It is also clear that the process has not impacted on more personal levels of change of mindset, behaviour and culture. The problem remains that, even if legislation succeeds in implementing equal opportunities for all South Africans across all sectors of our society, much more opportunities are needed to create a truly transformed society. That which has been termed as *transformation* in South Africa has thus far emerged as *transition*; falling short of presenting an apparatus for meaningful healing and change in our society. Mary Bast (1999) notes that the *clients'* <sup>1</sup> resistance to change can be used to identify the "sore spots" in the change situation and therefore their concerns (*key defenders of the status quo*) re change need to be taken into consideration. She suggests asking the following questions in this regard: What do they perceive as threats to their well-being? What might be dysfunctional about the change that has so far been overlooked? What is not yet understood about the sources of their mistrust?

The 2008 debacle in the South African cricket selection for the national Protea team for the test tour to India presents a sample of the intricacy of transformation in current society. Managers of sports teams in South Africa find themselves in the challenging

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the individual undergoing the change.

situation of having to select teams that could aspire to be the best in the world while, at the same, they must fulfil transformation targets for racial equity in sport. After white player Andre Nel received the Man-of-the-match award in the final test match against England a few weeks earlier, he was subsequently replaced by Charl Langeveldt (black/“coloured”) for the upcoming test series against India in March 2008.

Nel (International Cricket Council (ICC) ranking: number 6) declared candidly in the press that he was offended by the process, stating that SA cricket authorities were insulting both players by this step. An emotional Langeveldt (ICC ranking: no. 23), equally hurt by the event, withdrew from the India test tour. Some keen comments in reaction to this misfortune were posted on the News 24 electronic news website (19/03/2008 08:47). Your Story: *This is not transformation!*. The following excerpts reveal a good deal of society’s resistance to interpretations of *transformation* in South African society.

... to choose national level players who have proved themselves in the national squad and imply that they are only there because of colour is definitely not transformation and in my opinion nothing but a recipe for disaster (Peter Neil).

Transformation is a very tricky business, and the best way to deal with it is definitely not to discontinue it, but to debate and orientate it to all the sporting values which include representativity and form. The problem is, if you leave it in the hands of the Previously Advantaged, they'll frustrate it; if you leave it with the Previously Disadvantaged, an outcry of 'dropping standards' will be heard (The One).

No black person wants to be chosen because of the colour of their skin, it is an insult to the person's skill. We all work hard to be good at what we do and ... [to] say 'I choose you, not because you're good, but because you've the right colour skin', then thank you very much, no self respecting black person wants that (Zk).

[This] ... is a classic example of transformation gone wrong! How much longer will this poor guy have to prove himself before he is finally regarded as being "transformed"? (Anon).

In my opinion there is more racism in this country than ever before... People should be selected for sport or employed in companies because of merit & qualification not colour ... What happened to the "rainbow nation"? This is a "thunder cloud" nation (ALS).

... My heart goes out to all the players of colour. Many perceive that they are there on that basis alone, yet their stats prove otherwise (Saliem).

Observations like these suggest definite concerns of South Africans for the process of *transformation* and could, as such, identify a number of “sore spots” in this change track. The dysfunctional elements of the transformation process in our society must be acknowledged and the sources of people’s mistrust should be identified and understood.

Often viewed and prejudged as mere “affirmative-action appointments” in the work environment, black employees are grappling with *transformation-associated* suppositions. Professor Mkhize, head of the School of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, notes:

In some circles, there is an unspoken assumption that black appointees, being “affirmative action” candidates, are not capable or deserving of their positions. This occurs despite the black incumbents’ professional qualifications. It is not far-fetched to hypothesize that this is because race has been a major determinant of professional mobility in South Africa. On the whole, blacks have played the subservient roles as gardeners, messengers, domestics, and the like. It is therefore possible that, in interpersonal and even inter-group encounters, an unconscious racialised process kicks in (2007:1).

Any endeavour to transform society without addressing these “racialised” perceptions will be superficial and contradictory to the imbedded meaning of the term, which is certainly not that of mere window dressing. The process of transformation in South Africa is challenged by its own tension and conflict caused by the clashing of existing and new values, and addressing equity and workplace imbalances (Mkhize 2007:3).

This tension and conflict cannot simply be ignored. Acquiring and internalising new perspectives (learning and changing) create tension between what already existed in our understanding and that which is new. Piaget refers to the *alpha compensation* – to remain in our human equilibrium which exists as an inner sense of adapting to one’s environment (McCarthy Gallagher and Reid 2002:94). To facilitate actual learning, this state must be

shattered in fundamental ways to thwart the learner from interpreting the new in terms of what was already there, thus robbing the new of its disconcerting power.

Similar to actual learning, change is not an effortless experience. The 1995 White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (employer to about one per 30 inhabitants) states that change is “very often a complex and controversial process, almost invariably accompanied by anxiety and resistance in some quarters” (1995).

### 2.1.3 Change theories

A common principle in change theory is the notion that change is a process, a journey, which is neither painless nor uncomplicated. Fawcett (1996:8) notes that common principles in differing models proposed by change theorists are:

- Change is a predictable series of stages;
- Change is a process;
- Change is individualized;
- Anxiety and uncertainty are a part of change; and
- People involved in change need personal and technical support.

Fullan (1985:396) identifies change as a "process whereby individuals alter their ways of thinking and doing. It is a process of developing new skills and, above all, of finding meaning and satisfaction in new ways of doing things". He interprets the characteristics of cultural change principles as: moral purpose, understanding of the type of change needed, improved relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and increased coherence.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kurt Lewin, widely regarded as the founder of modern social psychology and the father of change theory, identified three stages of change that laid the foundations for many current approaches. Lewin, psychologist and social scientist with a background in physics, drew a parallel between social change and changing a block of ice into a completely different form. His basic model is packed in three stages: *unfreezing*, *cognitive restructuring/changing* and *refreezing*.

*Unfreezing*: Human nature has a preference for contexts in which people can feel relative safety and a sense of control. They attach their sense of identity to their environment and find comfort and stability in that which is familiar (past influences and learning). This creates a stasis – a state in which there is an absence of motion and development. The need to preserve this equilibrium transpires in a resistance to any form of change. This represents the initial frozen state. Just like the block of ice, individuals/organisations will naturally resist *unfreezing* if they do not become receptive to change. Schein (1995:2) identifies a second type of anxiety, *learning anxiety*, as the primary restraining force in the *unfreezing* process. He unpacks Lewin’s *unfreezing* as three processes that must be present in order to generate readiness and motivation for the change needed:

- *Disconfirmation*: dissatisfaction or frustration generated by information which disconfirms our expectations or hopes;
- *Survival anxiety*: the feeling that if we do not change, we will be unsuccessful in meeting our needs or achieving our ideals to take effect; and
- *Psychological safety*: this safety allows the change targets to accept the disconfirming information, feel the survival anxiety and become motivated to change.

In an interview with Coutu, Schein observes that *learning anxiety* stems from “fear of failure, of looking stupid, of having to change” and has to be balanced with enough psychological safety to allow a willingness to change (Coutu 2002:100). The need for change should be established and motivated. Kent notes:

... go where the hurt is. Go where there is some feeling that things aren’t working out right. That is where it will be more likely that change will be accepted ... or there will be this natural resistance. Go beyond that ... go where the hurt should be felt. Maybe it isn’t being felt where it ought to be felt (Kent 2001:14).

Kent (2001:12) identifies “unfreezing motivators” (such as a doctor’s report of impending death) that often attain immediate change of a patient’s eating/smoking/exercising habits. In South African society displeasure with the abysmal incidents of

racism and frustration with deficient mutual respect and reciprocity should act as such an “unfreezing motivator”.

*Cognitive Restructuring - Making the Change:* In this step the actual change is made. Those in need of change start making the needed adjustments (like starting the diet/exercise programme). It is a phase of re-thinking and re-learning. “[W]e learn that the anchors we used for judgment and comparison are not absolute, and if we use a different anchor our scale of judgment shifts” (Schein 1992:2). In situations where collective change is required, the relation between the individual and group standards is important. Most individuals feel safer when they belong to a group with similar standards and values as they themselves adhere to. To facilitate individual change in South African society, it is thus important to establish group values that relate to the desired/changed state: a truly transformed society. Further, for the needed improvement of our human system to occur, this society needs to be navigated and coached by the examples set by key role players (political, business, social, educational and religious leaders) as *agents of change*.

*Refreezing:* The change that has been obtained now needs to be cemented into the collective culture. The system has to incorporate the change as a permanent part of its operation. Like refreezing of water holds the new shape permanently, the systems in society (the way things are done) have to be adjusted to refreeze the change to become a permanent feature of that society and its culture.

Mbigi and Maree (1995:102) observe that the cultural dimensions have a significant impact on the management of transformational change in a society. Swartz notes that the very grounds of human communication and interaction are found in culture (1997:1). Without transformation of human interaction and communication in South Africa, a truly transformed society is unlikely to occur. There has been an increasing interest in the role that culture plays in determining human relations (Murithi 2006:25). This necessitates an understanding of what culture is, to navigate transformation of human interaction and communication and improved human relations in this society.

#### 2.1.4 Culture

Much effort has gone into defining *culture*. It encompasses all the practices through which a community engages with life: beliefs, language, religion, rituals, manners, norms of behaviour, art, etc. These practices are then passed down from generation to generation, but are in no way static or unchangeable. Different theories for understanding human activity are reflected in different definitions of *culture*. In 1874, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, British anthropologist (1832 -1917), defined culture as follows:

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (1920:1).

UNESCO (2002) defines culture as:

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations (UNESCO 2002).

Sindane (1995:12) notes:

Culture by and large is prescriptive. It says, ‘This is how such and such is done’. Hence it is common to hear people say, ‘in our culture, this is how we do it’ ... Culture therefore tends to identify a person more strongly with a particular group. You either belong to a culture or not. In other words, you are or you are not one of ‘us’. However, people can be assimilated into other cultures once they have adapted to the ways of life of a new group.

Schein (1992:12) notes that culture “is built up through its continuing enhancement of an organization’s [or society’s] ability to deal with its problems in a way that fixes its identity.” He moulds culture on three levels: 1. Artifacts; 2. Values and beliefs, which include judgments of what is good or bad; and 3. Basic assumptions. These assumptions include our deepest and most comprehensive explanation of reality – our perceptions of fundamental truths about people and the world.

Apartheid ensured little, if any, informal interaction between people of different races, depriving them of gaining insight into the spiritual, intellectual or emotional features of other social/cultural groups. Consequentially, the different ethnic groups' assumptions and judgments about each other were tainted: this in turn created superficial and often erroneous perceptions of fundamental truths about fellow South Africans. The past lack of interaction and genuine communication is aided by a present inability to access communicative practices of other groups in the country and affects current ways of living together in the greater South African community:

For example, in mainstream western culture, communication is conceived as an abstract, context-free activity: it is an expression of the individuality of the speaker. On the other hand, communication in African settings is largely a *responsive* activity ... transformation should involve willingness and an effort by all parties to immerse themselves into the lifeworld of the other as equals. It is not a process by which one group adapts or assimilates to others' ways of life. It involves a transformation of our modes of being in the world with others. Let the genuine dialogue begin (Mkhize 2007:5).

To transform the values, beliefs and consequent attitudes and behaviour in South African society, opportunities for informal interaction between people of different race and language groups need to be initiated. In working toward unity in diversity, experiences need to be afforded where glimpses into the others' lifeworlds are gained. Chapter 3 explores the possible role of choral singing in facilitating such experiences.

Upon entering the Oliver Tambo International Airport one is challenged by a giant mural with a sketch of the late Tambo accompanied by the following defining statement of his political philosophy:

**It is our responsibility  
To break down the  
Barriers of division  
And create a country where there will be neither  
Whites nor Blacks,  
just South Africans;  
Free and united in diversity.**



Aspiring to be free from historic heritage and its profound and complicated impact on present society is, at the very least, ambitious. In William P. Young's *The Shack*, challenging Mack on the nature of *freedom*, Elouisa eloquently converses:

Does it mean that you are allowed to do whatever you want to do? Or we could talk about all the limiting influences in your life that actively work against your freedom. Your family genetic heritage, your specific DNA, your metabolic uniqueness, the quantum stuff that is going on at a subatomic level ... Or the intrusion of your soul's sickness that inhibits and binds you, or the social influences around you, or the habits that have created synaptic bonds and pathways in your brain. And then there's advertising, propaganda, and paradigms. Inside that confluence of multifaceted inhibitors, [she sighs,] what is freedom really? (2007:95).

Inside the South African confluence of multifaceted inhibitors (generating multiple grounds for fear of change), what precisely is *transformation*? Transformation occurs on a deep personal level and requires inner shifts of mind and culture. For genuine transformation dialogue to begin in a complicated and "race-sensitive" society, a framework that is endowed with substance to accommodate meaningful change processes must be found. Relative and significant in the South African context, such a framework could possibly be found in the principles and ideas of *Ubuntu*, "a deeply moving yet intangible African soul force that has been demonstrated most powerfully by personalities like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther" (Nussbaum 2003a:2).

## 2.2 Ubuntu

Mbigi and Maree (1995:8) assert that "South Africa owes the birth of its nation to the emancipating spirit of Ubuntu". However, fourteen years into democracy, more meaningful ways of living together need to be found if the promise of Bishop Tutu's "Rainbow Nation" in South Africa is to be manifested. The principles of Ubuntu could possibly provide a buttress and funnel in finding such new ways. Gladwell (2000:132) notes that "[t]here is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible. All you have to do is find it." He terms this the

“stickyness factor” - the effect of persuasion - and identifies it as a key ingredient in modern day “tipping points” - occurrences of major and often sudden change. Ubuntu could well be the *stickyness factor* and desired packaging for change in South African society. An improved understanding and internalisation of the values of Ubuntu could support citizens in embracing their interconnectedness and doing so in the spirit of compassion.

In his address at the annual opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders, 23/02/07, then State President Thabo Mbeki, reminding the Houses of Parliament of great challenges posed by the disturbing levels of moral decay in the country, said:

I believe that these challenges are sufficiently acute to inspire and energise our traditional leaders vigorously to defend and promote the basic values of Ubuntu, and thus use our age-old value-system to defeat all that seeks to define and confirm the stereotyping of our people as barbaric and savage, which they are not. This will not succeed merely through making appeals for the return to the values of Ubuntu, but by collaborating with other institutions in our society to integrate the Ubuntu value system into the ordinary daily activities of all our people, young and old (Mbeki 2007).

The ideology of Ubuntu could afford society a possible way to handle resistance to transformation; acting as a “sponge” to soften the blows which past and present realities deal to meaningful change. A Nguni word from South Africa, Ubuntu points to human interconnectedness and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection. Ubuntu, which centers on compassion, can be regarded as an African code of conduct which can certainly benefit all South Africans across all racial divides.

### **2.2.1 Ubuntu defined**

For IT enthusiasts, the term *Ubuntu* may bring to mind an operating system similar to Microsoft’s Windows, developed by South African Mark Shuttleworth - a multi-millionaire from the .com-boom. Shuttleworth made 400 million pounds before his thirtieth birthday and has given away half of his fortune to charity. He is now spending his time and money on “taking on” Bill Gates; working hard on software that could one



day rival Microsoft. Shuttleworth's *Ubuntu* is an operating system similar to Microsoft but with one big difference: it is free of charge. The spirit reflected by Shuttleworth stems from a pre-colonial concept rooted and practised in Africa.

Nelson Mandela, inspiring symbol of tolerance and humanity, is regarded as a personification of Ubuntu. Mandela reflects: "In the old days, when we were young, a traveller through our country who stopped at a village would be given food – he did not have to ask. That is only one aspect of Ubuntu, there are many aspects" (Modise 2006). In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu (1999:34-35), Nobel Peace Prize winner who was also awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize by the President of India in 2007, reflects on his role of Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He emphasises that he leaned on both his Christian and cultural values, and specifically referred to the beliefs of Ubuntu to guide both perpetrators and victims during these hearings. Tutu explains that it is very difficult to render "Ubuntu" into a Western language: this African world-view eludes precise definition and classification and therefore the common depiction of the term is inadequate. He believes that such neat categorisation and definition would only be an oversimplification of a more unrestrained and philosophically accommodative idea. Constitutional Court judge J.Y. Mokgoro (1998) reiterates this view. Reflecting on *Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa*, she notes that the concept of Ubuntu, like many African concepts, is not easily definable. To her, Ubuntu is something that can best be recognised upon witnessing it experientially, yet one can never claim the last word on the subject.

Ubuntu is a rhetorical expression that depicts the significance of group solidarity and team spirit on matters vital to the survival of African communities. It depicts personhood and morality. Respect is reciprocal irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, age and gender. Ubuntu requires one to respect others if one is to respect oneself (Liwani 1990:194).

Ubuntu serves as the spiritual root of traditional African societies. It is a unifying world view preserved in the sayings:

IsiZulu: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*

IsiXhosa: *Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu*

Sotho: *Motho ke motho ka batho*).

This translates into the understanding that a person can only be a true person through the aid of others (*I am what I am because of you*). The principle of the individual gaining selfhood through others is the fundamental principle of Ubuntu. Fundamentally, this traditional African maxim expresses a central respect and compassion for others. Ubuntu can be interpreted as a rule of conduct or social ethic. It does not only describe being human as being *with others*, but stipulates the nature of and gives clear guidelines for the being with others.

Ubuntu represents *personhood, humanity, humaneness* and *morality*. It is a metaphor implying that the individual's entire existence is qualified by that of the group. It is a basic point of reference towards fellow beings that becomes evident in *anti-individualistic* conduct within the group *for the sake of individual survival*. Key social values include *group solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity*, thus forming a basis for a morality of *cooperation, compassion, communalism* whilst constantly emphasising the virtues of dignity in social relationships and practices. The 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare (South Africa) officially acknowledges Ubuntu as:

The principle of caring for each other's well-being ... a spirit of mutual support ... Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with other and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the right and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being.

Nussbaum (2003b:13) states that, in Africa, Ubuntu is the "capacity to express compassion, justice, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building, maintaining and strengthening community". It speaks to the human interconnectedness and the responsibility to each other that flows from this connection. It is about *mutual affirmation* and *communal responsiveness*. It is about the self being so rooted in the community, that the personal identity is defined by what you give to the community - 'It is through others that one attains selfhood.'

Ubuntu cannot easily be condensed into an automatic or mechanical practice. As articulated by Nussbaum (2003b:13): “It is rather the bedrock of a specific lifestyle or culture that seeks to honour human relationships as primary in any social, communal or corporate activity.” She points out that Ubuntu begins with simply knowing how to greet someone and provides the following examples of Shona greetings (from Zimbabwe) in the morning:

“Mangwani. Marara sei?” (*Good morning. Did you sleep well?*)

”Ndarara, kana mararawo.” (*I slept well, if you slept well*); and at lunchtime:

”Maswera sei?” (*How has your day been?*)

”Ndaswera, kana maswerawo.” (*My day has been good if your day has been good.*)

The above illustrates that, in the understanding of Ubuntu values, humans are so connected to each other that if one did not sleep well, or is not having a good day, it is unthinkable that the other could sleep well or have a good day. Compassion is a central part of Ubuntu. Nussbaum reflects on two practices of compassion that Africans are known for: 1) *Ukwena*, an act of giving or sharing without expecting any returns; and 2) *Ukusisa*, a 'yin', a form of investment that does not require collateral and also maintains the dignity of a poor person who has no assets.

According to the custom of ukusisa, those who have cattle or sheep give a cow or ewe to those who do not, to give the family an opportunity to acquire their own cattle and sheep over time. This is how newcomers in villages are helped. And this is how poorer communities and poorer countries could be helped. African values have a great deal to contribute to world consciousness, but Africa is greatly misunderstood in the West. Our world must embrace a sense of interconnectedness as a global community if we are to survive. Perhaps ubuntu is a framework that could inform our thinking in the twenty-first century (Nussbaum 2003b:3).

Societies informed by Ubuntu place a high value on communal life and everyone is involved with and responsible for maintaining positive relations within the society. Murithi, United Nations Peacemaking and Preventive Diplomacy programme officer, notes that traditional Ubuntu societies “developed mechanisms for resolving disputes and

promoting reconciliation with a view to healing past wrongs and maintaining social cohesion and harmony” (2006:25).

### **2.2.2 Ubuntu and opportunities for informal interaction**

For employees to find their own personhood in relation to others, opportunities need to be generated for exposure to the lifeworlds of the others. These procedures/interventions, designed to deal with the consequences of insufficient experiences of informal interactions on perceptions of employees must therefore, first and foremost, activate circumstances for such interactions. Such interventions can facilitate mutual exposure, a critical element in shedding the historic tainted evaluation of other groups.

In this context, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* translates as: “To be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form” (Van der Merwe 1997:1). Ubuntu encourages exposure to others and engaging with their lifeworlds. In encountering the particular characteristics of the other’s humanness, humans enlighten and enrich our own (Sindane 1995:9-13). The concept of defining oneself in relation to others implies existence within relationships. Exposure between self and others through occasions of informal interaction (and, as in the case with the AICF, sharing of cultural experiences and modes of communication from the others’ lifeworlds through the singing of their songs - often in the unfamiliar mother tongue of the other), has an effect on relationships with others. Ubuntu predicts that this influence on the relationship will influence the humanness of self. As respect for and understanding of the differing lifeworld of other cultures increases, one can expect the perceptions choir members from differing backgrounds/race/cultures hold of each other will change. “Ubuntu *defines* the individual in terms of his/her relationship with others” (Schutte 1993:46).

Relationship with others accommodates meaningful exposure to others. Ubuntu foresees that this exposure holds promise for deep level change in perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. Ubuntu embraces a flexible perception of the other, a notion of both being and becoming.

It is in this sharing that, on the one hand, cultural difference is transcended and, on the other, cultural arrogance overcome (Kwenda 2003:71).

### **2.2.3 Ubuntu and the workplace**

In order to revive the concept of Ubuntu at the work place, employees need to be unified and work relationships need to be strengthened whilst the notion of work ethic and self esteem is instilled (Liwane 1990:1994). Liwane further states that, as part of the healing process of reconciliation, “organisations should help restore this dignity in the spirit of compassion and care which are the essential elements of Ubuntu”.

If Ubuntu perceptions could find their way to employees’ minds (cognitive understanding) and hearts (emotive understanding) the “living together” part of the culture could begin to change.

The need to embrace African values becomes crucial, especially now that white South African corporate leaders and managers still swim in the pool of reconciliation and political rhetoric, without taking practical action or showing any real understanding. This limits their ability to recognize and harness the full potential of cultural, social, political and personal diversity. This will affect the quality of our competitive edge, or product and market viability. The South African human resources development potential could be overstretched and constrained (Mthembu 1996:219).

Founding procedures (events) for Ubuntu conduct of exposure to others as discussed above could accommodate and encourage deep level transformation in how fellow South African citizens of different race/language backgrounds relate to each other in the workplace. By accommodating such procedures, Ubuntu principles can facilitate the developing of a national sense of loyalty to and social cohesion within the bigger picture, South Africa, through swaying:

- uneducated perceptions and opinions members of different ethnic/race/language groups hold of each other
- inadequate understanding of self in relation to “other”

- opinions of/appreciation for cultural diversity; knowledge and acknowledgement of aesthetic cultural traditions of other groups
- the historic (and present) lack of reference to the “lifeworld” (including languages and means of communication) of other such groups.

Ubuntu speaks to attitudes towards profit. The employee will work for additional rewards for the benefit of his/her fellow man or woman – to share in the fruit of labour. What is earned is regarded in the light of the collected good of the community, as the Afrocentric view is on collective survival. This is in contradiction to the Western notion that if each individual focuses on attaining his/her personal best to reach a state of inner fulfilment, this will involuntarily benefit the team. Ubuntu advocates group loyalty as the key issue in building a team. The Nguni word for work, *umsebenzi*, means ‘service’. Joining a company is seen as a commitment to a new community (Nussbaum 2003b:14). By affirming the sense of Ubuntu community through strengthening relationships within the community, increased employee loyalty could impact positively on productivity and success in the workplace.

In *The Spirit of Ubuntu in African Management*, Mbigi (2000:10) states that the development of the following outcomes is crucial for future success in business in South Africa:

- co-operative and competitive people
- co-operative and competitive perspectives and
- co-operative and competitive practices and processes.

The intrinsic nature of the Absa Internal Choir Festival (as choir initiative and competition) promotes both co-operative and competitive attributes amongst participating Absa employees.

Booyesen has remarked that the AICF reflects the true spirit of Ubuntu. In 2006, addressing the nation on Heritage Day, then President Mbeki stated:



The spirit of Ubuntu which enshrined the values of group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity characterised the lifestyles of our forebears. The stories, legends, fairytales, the music and dance of this historical epoch reflect these values and norms (2006).

Developing a successful choir fosters values of group solidarity, compassion, respect and collective unity.

#### **2.2.4 Ubuntu, racism and nation building**

Racism, foremost heritage of the Apartheid era, poses a critical stumbling block to transformation in the South African community. No child is born with predetermined ideas about others; human beings are socialised into racism: “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate...” (Mandela 1994:542). This is learnt when they grow up with acquired racist stereotypes. These racist implications, such as prejudice and suspicion, perpetuate inflated views of perceived differences between diverse cultural groups in the South African society, which in turn exacerbate attitudes of prejudice and suspicion. This chain reaction poses an impasse for social transformation and nation building. Mandela continues: “I have always known that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity ... and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite” (1994:542). Ubuntu principles can help counteract the implications of racism socially constructed by Apartheid ideologies. In “Practical Peacemaking Wisdom from Africa: Reflections on *Ubuntu*”, Timothy Murithi (2006:29) notes that this “notion of *ubuntu* sheds light on the importance of peacemaking through the principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples. It provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness”. Tutu (1999:34-35) observes:

A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

Transformation efforts in South Africa need to promote acceptance, even celebration, of differences and should focus on the discovery of similarities between different people in the country. Besides the need for emphasising similarities there exists a need for creating a common survival agenda, “a new dimension of citizenship”. This citizenship entails the ability to “take personal accountability and responsibility for improving one’s situation”, and to live for one’s country (Mbigi and Maree 1995:2). Tutu confirms that all South Africans need to “embrace the full span of the South African community and recognise their own pivotal role and interconnectedness in this *community* if meaningful transformation is to take place in the country” (1999:164). The Ubuntu emphasis on human dignity, respect, collective unity and patriotism presents the apparatus to steer this process.

The final paragraph in the media statement released by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) pro the launch of a book on Ubuntu by IFP-MP Mfuniselwa Bengu provides a fine summary to this section:

In conclusion Mr. Bhengu said: "I submit this book to South Africa, as a nation, for use in our fight against the corrosion of our societal fiber, and the rebuilding of a peaceful and harmonious society - a world that is steeped in Ubuntu principles, such as human dignity, respect, honesty, compassion, brotherhood, tolerance, empathy, caring, sharing ... A world free of corruption, crime, rape, violence, oppression, racism ... It may sound like a dream world, but it is not impossible to reach (2007).

Ubuntu promoting of respect for others as a qualification for self-respect can be a catalyst for restoring colour to the faded rainbow Archbishop Tutu visualised for the South African nation.

### **2.3 Social Capital**

Ubuntu understandings such as interconnectedness of people, positive relationships for the sake of social cohesion and exposure to others resonate with matter dealt with in the field known as social capital. The fundamental idea of social capital is that social networks have value. Derived from the value that social capital places on social

networks, the interactions between people are esteemed as structures which unlock cooperative (and beneficial) actions and transactions with quantifiable results.

Central to most definitions of social capital is the focus on social engagement, mutual reciprocity and trust and networks within communities. Relationships are considered to be significant, promoting the interconnectedness of people that underpins functioning communities with potential for productivity. Social capital concerns itself with the collective value of all social networks – those structures formed on the foundation of people who know people. The beneficial inclinations to do things for each other, known as "norms of reciprocity", arise from these networks.

### 2.3.1 Forms of capital

University of Chicago professor and 1992 Nobel laureate in economics, Gary Becker, notes:

To most [people]...capital means a bank account, 100 shares of IBM, assembly lines or steel plants. These are all forms of capital in the sense that they yield income and other useful outputs over a long period of time (1992 Nobel lecture).

Adam Smith (1723-1790), hailed by many as the founding father of the discipline of economics (Rothbard 1995:435)<sup>2</sup>, distinguished between “circulating capital” and “fixed capital”. Circulating capital is a term also used by other classical economists such as David Ricardo and Karl Marx, and refers elements that are continually flowing in an organisation (such as raw materials, work in progress, finished goods and cash at hand). Smith defined four types of “fixed capital” - *that which affords a revenue or profit without circulating or changing masters*: 1) useful machines, instruments of the trade; 2) buildings as the means of producing revenue; 3) improvements of land and 4) human capital. Smith saw human capital as *skills, dexterity (physical, intellectual, psychological,*

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<sup>2</sup> Rothbard notes: “As we have already seen, Smith was scarcely the founder of economic science, a science which existed since the medieval scholastics and, in its modern form, since Richard Cantillon” (1995:435).

*etc.) and judgment.* More than two centuries later, writings about human capital would branch off into social capital. Different forms of capital have been identified including:

**Physical capital:** refers to physical objects, and includes the most basic components of an economy - resources that people cannot create more of, but instead can only extract from the existing supply, and change from one form to another.

**Economic capital:** focuses on the control of and command over economic resources such as money, property and other assets (Ihlen 2005:493). At its most basic level, economic capital can be defined as sufficient surplus to cover potential losses over a specified time horizon (Mueller et al. 2004). Economic capital is at the root of all other forms of capital (Swartz 1997:80).

**Human capital:** represents a measure of the economic value of employees' education, skills and experience for the employer and subsequently for the economy as a whole. The concept of human capital recognises that the quality of employees improves by investment in them. Becker observes that, on an individual level, the more educated and skilled people are, the more valuable they will be to themselves and potential employers. Human capital includes the related expenditures on education, training and medical care in the interest of developing individuals. Husz (1998:9) notes that human capital embraces not only a great number of components like time, experience, knowledge and abilities of an individual, but *inter alia* components like self image, routine and age. Human development theory describes human capital as being composed of distinct social, imitative and creative elements, of which social capital is but one such element.

**Cultural capital:** "the knowledge that enables an individual to interpret various cultural codes... [affecting his/her] level of activity in a community" (Soroka & Rafaeli 2006:163). French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who is strongly associated with this discipline, distinguishes three types of cultural capital: 1) embodied - in the lives of persons; 2) objectified - such as objects of art and 3) institutionalised - a university degree or qualification through an institution (Swartz 1997:76). He notes that the acquisition of cultural capital is accomplished through a long process of education by peers, family

members and social institutions. Bourdieu provides a construction for understanding the elitism of the experimental music audience through his concept of cultural capital.

**Natural capital:** inherent in nature and offering opportunities for human economic endeavour. It includes the essential ecosystems of a bioregion, made up of the reserve of resources (like timber, oil, coal, wildlife, fresh water, and minerals) and living systems (such as wetlands, prairies, coral reefs and rainforests), which present opportunities for resource harvest and extraction (Costanza and Cleveland 2008). In *Natural Capital and Human Economic Survival*, Prugh and his fellow authors disapprove of conventional economic wisdom's viewing of natural capital as a small part of the economy, as the economy exists and survives within the environment and not the other way around (1999:XV).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986:253) explains how certain types of capital could be acquired, exchanged and converted into other forms, and emphasises the role of different forms of capital in the reproduction of unequal power relations. He argues that unequal social relations are maintained “through a range of social processes that sustain inequalities in the interlocking phenomena of economic capital, human/cultural capital and social capital” (Campbell 2003:53-54).

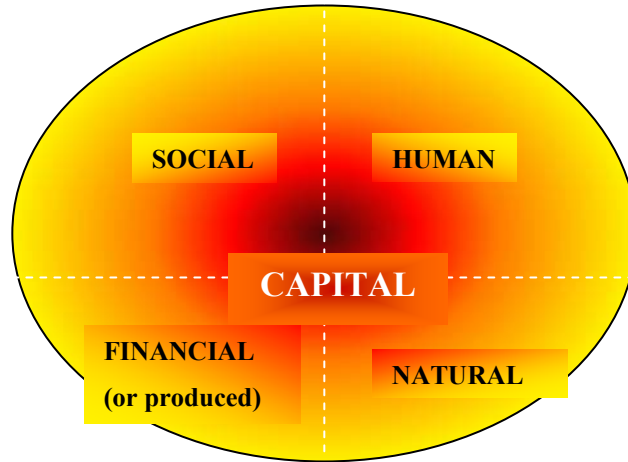
Attwood (2007:53-58) presents the following diagram to illustrate how interaction between four forms of capital that form the pillars of sustainable social development might be represented<sup>3</sup>. She explains: “the white dotted lines represent the osmotic relationship between the forms of capital which permeate one another, ultimately merging together in a more holistic picture to support particular social relations. It is also important to note that while the four forms of capital are represented equally here, this does not reflect how people actually draw on these forms of capital. Patterns of access and use may shift according to local contextual factors (e.g. the establishment of tourism in the area), ecological processes (e.g. a drought or demographic increase),

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<sup>3</sup> It important to note that each of these four broad forms have multiple sub-forms. For example, financial capital includes capital assets as well as physical assets such as property, buildings, cars and even roads (which could be considered physical capital – but have a monetary value).

macroeconomic policies and broader economic changes (e.g. a drop in the gold price resulting in the retrenchment of migrant workers)”.

**Diagram illustrating the relationship between four forms of capital**



**2.3.2 Social Capital: origins**

Even though social capital can be considered a newcomer in academic discussion, ingredients of the concept can be detected in early literature of sociology and economy. L. J. Hanifan, a state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia in the early twentieth century, was the first to use the idea of “social capital” in urging for community involvement for the development of successful schools in 1916:

... those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit ... The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself ... If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a ... substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the coöperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors (Putnam 2000:19).

The term did not gain immediate widespread usage. In *The Death and Life of Great Cities*, American academic Jane Jacobs considers the notion of social capital in comparing traditional neighbourhoods with planned estates. She notes that high density, mixed districts, where people were within walking distance of facilities and services and of each other, promoted a greater sense of community than in the case of ‘modern’ estates, segregated into zones. She further argued that *space* and *painstaking planning* had created obstacles that hindered human interaction and she solicited the authorities to amend their priorities: “[The] float of population must be a continuity of people who have forged neighborhood networks. These networks are a city’ s irreplaceable social capital” (Jacobs 1961:138).

Over the last two decades social capital has become an increasingly popular topic of study in fields like economics, sociology and political science. Much of the current interest can be ascribed to the writings of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. The work of Pierre Bourdieu, in a chapter on the forms of capital in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Richards 1986); and shortly thereafter, that of Coleman (1988) moved the idea into the academic discourse arena. However, it was the work of Robert D. Putnam (1993, 1995), and in particular his thoughts in *Bowling alone* (2000), that brought social capital its current acknowledgment as an authentic topic for research and scholarly discussion.

### **2.3.3 Conceptualising Social Capital: Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam**

Few concepts in the field of sociology have gained as much recognition or as many disciples over such a short period of time as is the case with social capital; it is therefore understandable that the discipline is often criticised for lack of clarity in the conceptualisation of the term:

In this body of [social capital] literature, however, considerable conceptual confusion exists because of different uses of the term by different authors (Schaefer-Mc Daniel 2004:154).

For the purpose of establishing a relation between social capital and the AICF, this study will limit its investigation to the work and interpretations of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam in an endeavour to shape a reasonable definition/description of the term.

- **Bourdieu**

Bourdieu initially used *social capital* to explain how social and economic impetus create and maintain capitalist customs. He portrays social capital as a compilation of actual or potential resources linked to a strong network of “more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (1986:243-248). Bourdieu and Wacquant understand social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1992:119).

Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, cultural, symbolic<sup>4</sup> and social capital, where economic capital provides the roots for the other forms. He believes that economic, cultural and social capital together fashion the acceptable actions in any field of operation. Conversion from one form of capital to another is possible, but Bourdieu warns that it demands effort. Long-term investment is required to produce profit, as in the case of parents making a considerable financial investment in good schooling to “buy” cultural/social capital for their children: benefit derived from activities in one area is necessarily paid for by costs in another.

The value of an individual’s human and cultural capital is an important role player in his/her desirability to the group, to building networks and to current and future employers. The value of social capital accumulated from a relationship is affected by the value of the individual’s human capital. The collective capital in the group belongs to every member and provides a permit which sanctions them to draw from this capital (Bourdieu 1986:245), amounting to social debt or credit formed through cohesive social networks. The networks act as agents through which social capital is generated and

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<sup>4</sup> Symbolic capital: manifestation of each of the other forms of capital when they are naturalised on their own terms (Attwood 2007:56).



sustained, and from whence it is extracted. Bourdieu recognises that feasible networks are the product of immense effort at institutional level as they constantly need to be generated, maintained and reproduced all the time. The social connections materialising from these networks are adaptable and exchangeable into economic capital and therein lays the basis of social capital (Bourdieu 1986:247).

- **Coleman**

Sociologist and academic James Coleman, who had for a long time been interested in individual behaviour in relation to the systemic, developed an alternative perspective of social capital.

In place of Bourdieu, Coleman is much more likely to be lauded as the inspiration for social capital ... Coleman transformed social exchange to social capital, reinvigorated individual as rational choice, and shifted analytical emphasis away from psychological and other factors towards the economic (Fine 2001:17,18).

Coleman identifies social capital as the collection of relationships between individuals and within groups which facilitate the achievement of outcomes which could not be achievable in its absence. Like Bourdieu, he transmits social capital to educational contexts. In employing principles of social capital to explain different educational outcomes, Coleman establishes that the nature of the relationships between the school, the home and the immediate community has a significant influence on the scholastic achievement of learners. He supports Bourdieu's view that social capital can be converted to other forms of capital but focuses on the *collective* and *functionalist* aspects of social capital:

[Social capital is] defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors (Coleman 1994:302).

Actors can be individual or corporate actors (Hardin 2003:99) who utilise a variety of resources which collectively contain the following two ingredients: 1) some aspect of social structure and 2) they facilitate the actions of the actors (Coleman 1988:98). Social

capital is a neutral resource – the merit of the impact of the action is wholly dependent upon the intention of the action. Coleman takes cognizance of three elements: *networks*, *reciprocity* and *trust*; where networks and reciprocity are in essence “outcomes of trust” (Stone and Hughes 2002).

Coleman’s understanding of social capital reconciles the relationship between human capital and organisational success. Literature on *high performance systems* has attempted to identify practices that permit improved organisational performance across a wide scope of industries and work locations. The logic of such practices lies in the recognition that the knowledge and information possessed by employees is valuable for organisational survival and success (Ramanand et al 2001). *High performance* entails the existence of high-quality productivity. Coleman’s definition of social capital points out that the kinds of training which do not directly relate to the individual skills levels of employees still impact positively on the levels of productivity in the workplace (St.Clair 2005:440). This proposition of social capital is significant to the value of the AICF as a tool for organisational development, since the intent of the AICF is not directly related to the administrative or operational skills levels of the bank employees.

- **Putnam**

The popularisation of the concept of social capital is largely attributed to the work of Robert D. Putnam, Harvard political scientist and highly acclaimed academic. In *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy* (1993) Putnam turned the spotlight on social capital and its role in the decline of reciprocity in American civil society. He derives his conclusions from a research project on Italian local government centering on social capital.

Since the publication of Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy work*, the concept of social capital has achieved a new prominence in the social science community ... [It] has generated more discussion and debate than any work of political science in recent years (Boix & Posner 1996:1).

Putnam deems social capital a powerful resource as it facilitates cooperation. He regards the simple feat of associating together as the catalyst that spurs the social cooperation which makes democracy feasible. Of particular interest to this study, is Putnam's view that "[g]ood government in Italy is a by-product of singing-groups and soccer clubs..." (1993:176).

In *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community* (2000) Putnam links social capital to the recent decline in American political participation and increase in conservative right-wing politics. This decline is evident in the lower levels of trust in government and civil participation. World Bank social scientist Michael Woolcock (2001:13-14) notes that, prior to *Bowling Alone*, many of the main contributions to the concepts of social capital fell short of ascertaining the different types of social capital. Putnam (2000:23-24) distinguishes between: 1) *Bonding social capital* - the social ties and networks formed between people in analogous situations or class groups such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours. This type (Stone and Hughes 2002:2) is exclusive, inward looking and helps "getting by" in daily life. It tends to strengthen elite identities and homogenous groups; and 2) *Bridging social capital* - includes more distant social ties between individuals, such as loose friendships and surface relationships between employees. It's more inclusive, outward-looking nature allows for links between people of dissimilar social groupings, thus generating broader identities and reciprocity. This type helps "getting ahead" (Stone and Hughes 2002:3) by making the resources and opportunities which exist in one network accessible to a member of another. Putnam (2007:165) contends:

... we need to work toward bridging, as well as bonding. Senator Barack Obama, whose life story embodies ties between immigrant and native-born America, has called for ... an America where race is understood in the same way that the ethnic diversity of the white population is understood. People take pride in being Irish-American and Italian-American. They have a particular culture that infuses the (whole) culture and makes it richer and more interesting. But it's not something that determines people's life chances and there is no sense of superiority or inferiority ... [We need to] expand that attitude to embrace African-Americans and Latino-Americans and Asian-Americans, [to ensure that]... all our kids can feel comfortable with the worlds they are coming out of, knowing they are part of something larger.



Field (2003:42) notes that Putnam does not really engage with *Linking social capital*. The latter type extends to unlike people in disparate situations or groups, for example those entirely outside of a community. This presents a considerably wider scope and variety of resources than bonding or bridging social capital. Stone and Hughes (2002:3) regard this type as involving “social relations with those in authority, which might be used to garner resources or power”.

In *Bowling Alone* Putnam proposes a convincing case for the importance of social capital. He highlights its ability to generate 1) cooperation, 2) opportunities to resolve collective problems more easily, 3) benefits of shared responsibility for the individual and 4) organisational machinery that encourage collectively desired individual behaviour. In Putnam’s view, social capital is the grease that allows communities’ wheels to proceed smoothly. The trust and interactions created via social capital cause everyday business, as well as social, transactions to be less costly. Social capital also broadens individual awareness and understanding of human interconnectedness which sequentially encourages active and trusting connections to others. Trusting connections, in turn, promote the development of behavioural patterns and character traits that are in the interest of the broader society.

Putnam allots individual wellbeing to those who deal prosperously in social capital. The networks proffered by this prosperous dealing act as channels for helpful information that assists humans in reaching their goals. Connected people grow to be less suspicious, more tolerant, and also more compassionate to the adversity of others. People who lack connection to others lack opportunities to test the validity of their own beliefs and are therefore more prone to be influenced by and act upon their own impulsive and untested notions. Those whose lives are rich in social capital have improved abilities to fight illnesses and cope with stress and traumas. Putnam notes that through joining an organisation rich in social capital, an individual’s chance of dying within the next year is cut in half.

In 2007 Putnam disclosed the results of the 2006 *Capital Community Benchmark Survey*. This mammoth five year research project - a follow up to a similar survey done in 2000 - involved 41 communities in the USA. The objective of the survey was to evaluate the levels of trust and social capital in ethnically diverse societies. The outcomes present revealing information re diversity that is pertinent to the South African setting, and hence of consequence to this study. Leo (2007) reports:

Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, is very nervous about releasing his new research, and understandably so. His five-year study shows that immigration and ethnic diversity have a devastating short- and medium-term influence on the social capital, fabric of associations, trust, and neighborliness that create and sustain communities. He fears that his work on the surprisingly negative effects of diversity will become part of the immigration debate, even though he finds that in the long run, people do forge new communities and new ties.

Derived from interviews with more than 30,000 people in the 41 selected sites, the findings of Putnam (2007:150) and his research associates are that racial diversity impacts significantly on levels of inter-personal trust. The greater the racial diversity, the weaker the inter-personal trust. Communities where significant racial diversity prevails, demonstrate:

- Lower confidence in local government, local leaders and the local news media;
- Lower frequency of registering to vote, but more interest and knowledge about politics and more participation in protest marches and social reform groups;
- Lower confidence that people can influence politics;
- Less expectation that others will cooperate to solve "dilemmas of collective action" (for instance, conserving water in a drought);
- Less likelihood of working on a community project;
- Lower likelihood of giving to charity or volunteering;

- Fewer close friends and confidantes; less happiness and lower perceived quality of life; more time spent watching television, considering television as the most important form of entertainment.

A result of the *Capital Community Benchmark Survey* that is significant to the South African context is the unearthing of a considerable dwindling of trust in racially diverse societies between members of 1) differing race groups (inter-racial) as well as 2) homogeneous groups (intra-racial). In other words, there exists a reduced amount of trust in *everyone*, not just in people of other races. Putnam concludes that inhabitants of diverse communities tend to “withdraw from collective life, distrust their neighbours, withdraw even from close friends, expect the worst from their community and its leaders ... have less faith that they can make a difference ... Diversity, at least in the short run, seems to bring out the turtle in all of us” (Leo 2007).

If, indeed, the trust and interactions created via social capital produce less costly business and social transactions, the erosion of communal trust translates to the converse: inflated costs of transactions. It would undoubtedly be in the interest of corporate business to take cognizance of such an occurrence. Further, should the findings of this research project indicate that the AICF presents an agreeable avenue for increasing trust amongst members of diverse groups, it would hold significant meaning for the role of *music<sup>5</sup>* (specifically choir participation) in a diverse society in South Africa and elsewhere.

## 2.4 Teambuilding

Teams in many different forms are ever-present in various categories of *doing* in life.

Teams come in every shape and size – spouses in a marriage, colleagues at work, volunteers together for a good cause ... There are no lone rangers. It's a myth that one person can do something great. Strong leaders who changed our country dreamed big and were successful because they were always part of teams ... It takes teamwork to make the dream work (Maxwell 2002: from Front matter).

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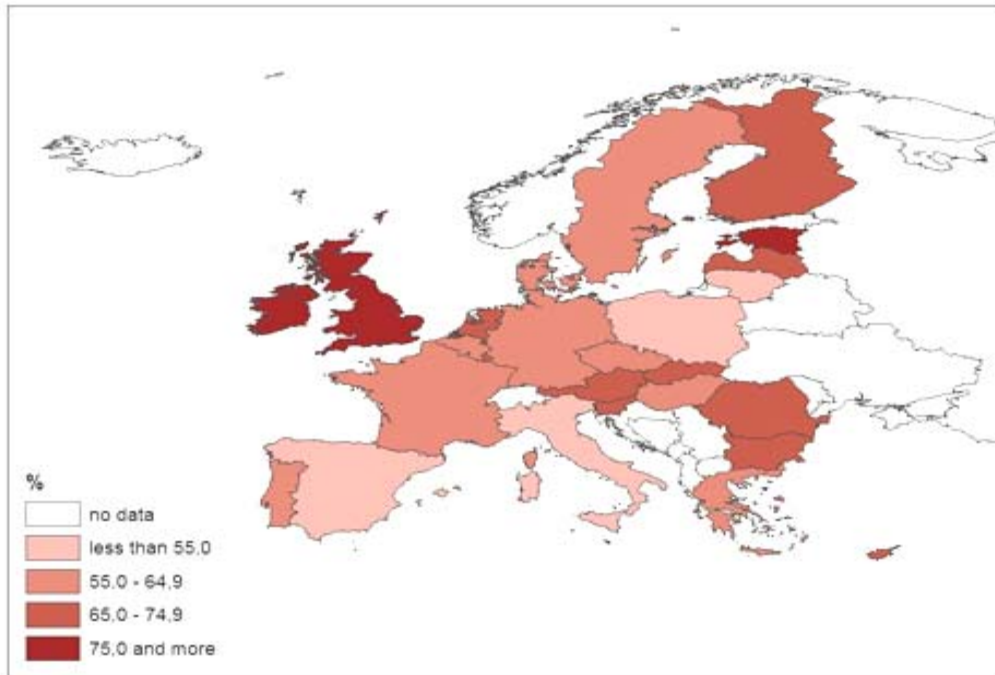
<sup>5</sup> Sometimes spelt “music<sup>5</sup>ing”; the act of music-making (Elliott 1995).

In 2003 the Level Playing Fields Institute with the Center for Survey Research at the University of Connecticut conducted an extensive, representative survey to measure U.S. employers' and employees' opinions on issues in the workplace (HOW-FAIR 2003:28). This venture revealed that Americans deem 'being a team player' the most important factor in getting ahead in the workplace; more important than factors such as *intelligence*, *leadership skills*, *merit and performance*, *creativity*, *making money for the organization* or even *who you know*. Lencioni (2003:35) confirms this observation: "Virtually every executive staff I've ever come across believes in teamwork." Kimball Fisher, a leading authority on managing self-directed work teams, predicts that many of the more conventional forms of operation will be replaced by the use of teams in the near future (Beckham 1998:48).

Teamwork author Glenn Parker (2008) notes that notwithstanding the significant number of highly regarded books highlighting the value of teamwork and team playing in the 1980s, teamwork was considered "nice" but not critical for the success of the corporation. Then,

... at the end of that decade, teamwork gained in importance as public and private leaders saw the tangible benefits of effective programs. Global competition, workforce changes, the impact of technology, and other factors pushed organizations in the United States to experiment with team approaches to achieve cost-effective, quality products and services (Parker 2008:1).

The following map, borrowed from Kyzlinková et al (2007), reflects the % incidence of teamwork in the European Union (EU) in 2007:



Williams (1995:46) concurringly reports that in the 1990s “...self-directed work teams are, on average, 30 to 50 percent more productive than their conventional counterparts”. He provides examples of organisations that attributed major productivity results to the advantage of such teams at the time: *AT&T* - increased the quality of its operator service by 12 percent; *Federal Express* - cut service errors by 13 percent; *Johnson & Johnson* - achieved inventory reductions of \$6 million; *Shenandoah Life Insurance* - cut staffing needs, saving \$200,000 per year, while handling a 33-percent greater volume of work; and *3M's Hutchinson facility* increased production gains by 300 percent.

#### 2.4.1 Defining “team”

With the intention of establishing an understanding of meaningful *teamwork* it is essential to establish criteria for the concept *team*. Teams are not merely groups of people and not all working groups are teams. Mere functioning groups are often erroneously referred to as teams, for instance *sales team*, *cleaning team* and others. Members of such groups



function predominantly independently of the group, focusing on fulfilling personal goals and objectives rather than team goals.

The essence of a team is shared commitment. Without it, groups perform as individuals; with it, they become a powerful unit of collective performance ... A working group relies on the individual contributions of its members for group performance. But a team strives for something greater than its members could achieve individually (Katzenbach and Smith 1993:111).

The facets and definitions of actual teamwork are bountiful and present the differentiation between the behaviour of the individual in a *team* and the individual in a functioning *group*. Numerous unambiguous examples of successful teamwork are presented in sports where the notion that “championships are won by great teams - not great individuals” is undisputed. Belbin (2002:18) notes that the word ‘team’ appears to have been borrowed in the first instance from sport and signified “being on the same side and pulling together.”

Teamwork literature<sup>6</sup> universally designates characteristics such as *common goals, cooperation, unison, interdependency* and *willingness to sacrifice individual interest for the sake of group interest* to successful teams. In a *team*, member attitudes and behaviours toward fellow team members and the team’s work are indicators of the level of team efficiency. Successful teams illustrate 1. *shared responsibility and rotating roles*; 2. *broad contribution to initiating, problem-solving and decision-making processes*; 3. *mutual support, respect and trust*; 4. *even sharing of the workload necessary to reach team goals*; and 5. *transparent and consistent conflict management* (Lee 2008).

Team definitions further portray:

Cohesive unit of people who enjoy the privileges of making decisions and continuously work to improve the organization ... The team helps to align the organization around the functions [and comprises the] ability to work toward a common vision (Lamancusa, J. s.a.).

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<sup>6</sup> *Team spirit* is recorded from 1928; *Teamwork* from 1828 in the literal sense, from 1909 in the extended sense (Online Etymology Dictionary 2001).

... a joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group (Webster's New World College Dictionary 2000).

A work group becomes a team when shared goals have been established and effective methods to accomplish those goals are in place (Wheelan 1999:3).

Katzenbach and Smith (2003:45) describe a team as a [1] small number of people with [2] complementary skills who are committed to a [3] common purpose, performance goals, and [4] approach for which they hold themselves [5] mutually accountable. Cadwell (1997:11) elucidates that:

- The more members in the team, the more challenging it can be to keep the team focused and keep everyone involved, and that the skills required will dictate the size of the team;
- The need to have or develop the “right mix of skills” – including problem-solving and interpersonal skills - to achieve team goals;
- The purpose and goals present the reason for being a team and therefore need to be clear to all the members;
- Teams need to agree on strategies and work ethics; and
- Successful teams understand that there must be consequences for members who do not meet their commitments or fail to support other team members.

Crucial to the performance of teams are the abilities and behaviours of their members. Relevant to this are the roles that team members play (Yen et al 2006:192).

#### **2.4.2 Types of teams**

There are various types of teams operating in the workplace. These include: Traditional teams can be departments or sections that operate as functioning groups. Leaders are appointed by the organisation. Targets are assigned by the organisation and the leader has

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**Leadership teams** generally consist of managers from different sections, i.e. finance, production and marketing to develop a shared strategy for delivering outcomes. At top management levels, teams are responsible for setting goals and developing strategic direction for the organisation.

**Problem-solving teams** are generally cross-functional (represent different areas of the organisation) and have to find solutions to problems that cannot be resolved through normal company procedures.

**Project teams** are formed for a defined period of time, for a specific purpose, and are disbanded when the purpose is fulfilled. The team functions under the guidance of a leader who reports to upper management.

**Virtual teams** are a product of development in communication technology. Members are drawn from various expert and stakeholder groups (could be consultants or contractors employed by external organisations), can be located across a country or even the world. They are chosen for their technical skills rather than their Belbin leadership roles and individual members are thus primarily committed to themselves and not to the other members of their team (Thomsett 2008).

**Informal teams** are usually formed for social purposes with common concerns and interests not necessarily similar to those of the institution. Leaders are selected from the membership and not appointed by the organisations.

Some vital features of the Absa choirs are contained in *cross-functional* and *self-directed work teams*. Subsequently these types are discussed in much more detail.

### **Cross-functional teams (CFTs)**

CFTs are comprised of members from different departments or units in the organisation. Parker (1998) identifies six competitive advantages in employing CFTs: 1. Speed – they achieve results faster, specially in product development and customer services fields; 2. Complexity – since they pull together different skill sets, experiences, perceptions and

style, CFTs bring about improved organisational capacity for solving complex problems; 3. Increased creativity – as a by-product of the clash of ideas, augmented creativity can generate new product and service breakthroughs; 4. Customer focus - CFTs accommodate the focus of the whole organisation-effort on satisfying internal or external customer or group of customers; 5. Organisational learning – members grasp technical and professional skills, gain important knowledge about other departments within the organisation and learn to work with people; and 6. Single point of contact – CFTs afford a company a single location for information and decisions about a project or customer.

### **Self-directed work teams (SDWTs)**

In the chaos of industrialisation in the 1930s, the rapidly growing industry depended on a mainly unskilled workforce. Ford automobile factories perfected the so-called *scientific management model* - the breaking down of work into specialised segments to afford workers to gain rapid proficiency - as the mechanism for order and certainty. This set off a movement to mass production and standardised factory work with the associated implication of social isolation for employees. SDWTs, on the contrary, are based on an innovative concept that restructures work around whole processes instead of the traditional reduction of processes to individual steps. Since the 1990s this concept has been contributing to productivity breakthroughs in organisations. Traditional systems reduce required skills at every level of work which creates boredom in bottom-level jobs. The SDWT system allows those closest to the job to participate in designing the job, integrating the needs of the people with the work at hand. SDWTs afford companies the opportunity to redistribute power, authority and responsibility so that those (employees) closest to the customer as well as the end product have decision-making capability (Williams 1995:51).

An important difference between traditional work teams and SDWTs is the level of interdependence emerging in the team (Beckham 1998:48). SDWTs demand individual as well as mutual accountability. This necessitates a common commitment in the team as all the members take responsibility for the overall effort of the group in addition to their

own individual effort. SDWTs member responsibilities include setting goals for the group and individuals and assuming full responsibility for the full scope of responsibilities to achieve those goals. They control and inspect their own work, coach and counsel teammates and assume responsibility for training new personnel (Beckham 1998:49).

SDWTs make use of external as well as internal leaders. Internal leaders are chosen by the group and are often rotated within the group. They do not have the full range of responsibilities of the external facilitator and focus on steering and encouraging the team, filling in for absent team members, assisting team members in developing interpersonal skills and representing the team at meetings.

Team members are required to fulfil new roles. In their traditional roles in the organisation (before joining the SDWT) members might never have functioned outside their technical/specialised roles in the organisation. Now they are required to develop non-technical skills relating to the Belbin team roles, learning to co-ordinate their tasks with other members in the team and generating enough know-how to act as generalists over a broader sphere of tasks than before. They may also be expected to take on leadership responsibilities for a period of time.

Building SDWTs is clearly more challenging than taking employees out of the office for a fun day of communal amusement, or some superficial and stereotypical “teambuilding activity”. Developing SDWTs require deep level transformation over an extended period of time.

### **2.4.3 Team roles**

The proposed number of essential team roles vary from four (Parker 1998) to fifteen (Davis et al 1992). Belbin (1993:16) believes that high team performance is associated with teams which are balanced in terms of the team roles represented amongst team members. He identifies nine team roles required for optimal team functioning. He categorised these roles into three groups: Action Oriented (*Shapers, Implementers* and *Completer-Finishers*), People Oriented (*Coordinator, Team Worker* and *Resource*

*Investigator*) and Thought Oriented (*Plant, Monitor-Evaluator* and *Specialist*). In efficient teams the roles are fulfilled by the whole mix of team members whose preferred leadership roles provide different but complimentary approaches to the work of the team.

Thomsett International, an Australia based project management group that provides business consultancy and educational workshops all over the world notes:

Our own experience supports Belbin’s belief that leadership is not primarily resident in one person but rather shifts between team members depending upon the particular situation or problem facing the team. In a well-designed and effective team, each team member provides a set of different team/leadership roles and for a team to be effective a mix of roles and leadership is required. In general, most people can undertake only two or three of the above roles effectively. What is conclusive is that a team without all these leadership roles available at various times of crisis would fall apart and would never be a high-performing team (Thomsett 2008).

Belbin’s (1981, 1993) proposed team roles are:

<b>Coordinator</b>	Controlling the way in which a team moves forward towards the group objectives by proactive involvement of all team members and making the best use of team resources;
<b>Shaper</b>	Shaping the way in which team effort is applied, directing attention, seeking to impose some shape or pattern on group discussion and on the outcome of group activities;
<b>Monitor-Evaluator</b>	(1) Analysing problems in a practical manner; (2) evaluating ideas and suggestions so that the team is better placed to take balanced decisions;
<b>Resource Investigator</b>	Exploring and reporting on ideas, developments and resources outside the group; creating external contacts that may be useful to the team and conducting any subsequent negotiations;

<b>Implementer</b>	(1) Turning concepts and plans into practical working procedures; (2) carrying out agreed plans systematically and efficiently;
<b>Team Worker</b>	Supporting members in their strengths (e.g. building on suggestions), understanding and supporting team members in their shortcomings, improving communications between members and fostering team spirit generally;
<b>Planter</b>	Advancing new ideas and strategies with special attention to major issues and looking for possible new approaches to the problems with which the group is confronted;
<b>Specialist</b>	Providing technical direction in team work, directing purely on technical expertise; seeking to impose some shape or pattern on group discussion and on the outcome of group activities based on technical issues;
<b>Completer</b>	Ensuring that the team is protected as far as possible from mistakes (commission/omission); actively searching for aspects of work which need special attention; and maintaining a sense of urgency within the team.

Adapted from Thomsett International tutorial

#### 2.4.4 Teambuilding/group development theories

In the 1960s Bruce Tuckman reviewed multiple group development studies. He combined the common factors in one of the most cited group development models ever. He describes the four stages for group decision making as: *forming*, *storming*, *norming* and *performing* (Tuckman 1965:396). In 1977, after reviewing further studies, a fifth stage namely adjournment was added to his model (Tuckman and Jensen 1977:419). Each



stage in the Tuckman model engages two aspects: *interpersonal relationships* (socio-emotional needs) and *task behaviours* (instrumental needs).

### Tuckman's Five Stages of Team Development

<b>Forming</b>
Members become acquainted with one another, assess the group task and ground rules for the task. Team members are very polite, willing to go along with suggestions made and try to avoid making enemies by remaining patient with one another
<b>Storming</b>
The novelty of being a team member is wearing off and leadership struggles and interpersonal conflict begin. Task related conflicts emerge. Listening and finding mutually acceptable resolutions to the conflict becomes obligatory.
<b>Norming</b>
The team determines acceptable performance standards re quality, developing and team functioning. To proceed to the next stage, it is now crucial to establish harmonious relationships within the group.
<b>Performing</b>
The team is ready to be productive and focus on the task. Member roles have been clarified and established. Problem-solving skills learnt in previous stages simplify group interaction. However, if this stage was reached without working through issues of earlier stages, the team may disband, or regress and address those issues.
<b>Adjourment</b>
The team disengages after successful completion of the task. This can be a happy stage with mutual congratulations on a job well done, or regrets of possible loss of friendships



There are several other recognised theories of group development. **Tubbs** (1995:235) developed a four-phase model: Orientation, Conflict, Consensus and Closure. He recognises conflict as a vital component of the group's development, allowing the group to weigh ideas aptly and avoid groupthink<sup>7</sup>. In outlining four phases through which groups are inclined to progress en route to decision-making, **Fisher** (1970:53-66) takes particular notice of the reality of interaction – its content and evolution – in the process of formulating and solidifying the group decision. His proposed phases are Orientation, Conflict, Emergence and Reinforcement. **Poole** (1983:326) developed a multiple-sequences model to accommodate different groups employing different sequences in making decisions. He rejects phasic models of group development and proposes a model of continuously developing threads of activity as he considers discussions to be characterised by interwoven tracks of activity and interaction.

**McGrath** (1991:147-174) highlights the perception that different teams could possibly follow different developmental pathways to reach the same outcome. He suggests that teams engage in four modes of group activity and understands “modes” as forms of activity that are possible and not requisite. This leads him to believe Mode I: inception (goal choice) and Mode IV: execution (goal attainment) to be involved in all group tasks and projects, while Mode II: technical problem solving (means choice), and Mode III: conflict resolution (policy choice) may not be involved in any particular group action. The model proposes that the group is always acting in one of the four modes with respect to each of three functions: production, well-being and member support.

Another contemporary framework of group development is Gersick's (1988, 1989) Punctuated Equilibrium, which proposes that groups work on their tasks in the same chronological pattern regardless of group structure, tasks, or deadlines. Gersick observed that, for the most part, internal group processes focused on the same time frame set for team projects. Johnson et al (2002:382) expound that the framework is characterised by

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<sup>7</sup> William H. Whyte (1952:239) is accredited for coining the term in 1952. He notes: "Groupthink being a coinage - and, admittedly, a loaded one - a working definition is in order. We are not talking about mere instinctive conformity - it is, after all, a perennial failing of mankind. What we are talking about is a rationalized conformity – an open, articulate philosophy which holds that group values are not only expedient but right and good as well".

five time segments: three brief transition periods at the beginning, mid-point and end; and two long work periods between the transition points. The first transition point starts when the group meets for the first time, establishing strategies to realise their first tasks during the first long work period. This is followed by the second transition, midway through the group project time, setting the direction for the second long work period. This transition is characterised by the re-examining of group strategies, procedures and goals. The second long work period is comparable to Tuckman's Performing stage: the outcome becomes the focal point as the team develops and interacts. The last transition point transpires in the completion point as the group concludes the task and adjourns. Overall, the team's effectiveness and realisation of goals hinge on conflict management, fostering of roles for working together and the mutual support within the group.

**Morgan, Salas and Glickman** (1994:277-291) developed the *Team Evolution and Maturation (TEAM) model* which combines multiple theories as well as the development models of Tuckman and Gersick. It encompasses nine developmental stages which are described as "relatively informal, indistinct and overlapping" periods of development. Seven central stages (*storming, forming, norming, performing-I, reforming, performing-II* and *conforming*) are supplemented by two additional stages: *pre-form* (that which leads to the origin of the team), and *de-form* (disbanding). This model indicates that teams might begin a given period of development at different stages and spend diverse amounts of time in the various stages. Dynamics such as the characteristics of the team and its members, nature of tasks, milieu-related demands and constraints and even past experiences will determine any given team's beginning point and pattern of progress through the different stages.

#### **2.4.5 Critiques of teamwork in the workplace**

Critiques of teamwork highlight a number of possible negative consequences of the application of teamwork strategies in the work environment. Concerns related to teamwork in the workplace include: the incidence of rationalised conformity

(groupthink), undermining of independent individual vision, increased work stress, and friction caused by cultural differences (including differing political and religious beliefs).

A report on the findings of a recent, extensive research project investigated the issue of teamwork as pertaining to working conditions in High Performance Working Organisations (HPWOs)<sup>8</sup> in European countries (Kyzlinková et al 2007), reveals the following:

- Employees who spend at least one third of their time working to tight deadlines are 20% more likely to work in teams than employees who rarely work to challenging deadlines;
- Where work involves complex tasks, the likelihood for teamwork increases by 70%; and
- Employees who are allowed to give their opinion on organisational changes have a 76% higher chance to be working in a team than others.

Additional information was brought to light regarding the following factors investigated:

**Insufficient time to get the job done:** No correlation between teamwork and inadequate time to get tasks done could be proven. In addition, contradictory results were witnessed in this regard: while more employees working in teams in Finland and Denmark more felt that they have insufficient time to complete tasks compared to other employees, the opposite tendency was identified in Austria with 21.2% fewer team workers mentioning problems with insufficient time for job completion than other employees.

**Impact of teamwork on the learning environment:** The vast majority of the correspondents highlighted the positive correlation between teamwork and employee training. Furthermore, team workers are more likely to learn new things in their work than are those not working in teams.

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<sup>8</sup> A high performance work organisation focuses on 1) increasing employees' impact on the business and 2) the influence of processes, methods, the physical environment, technology and tools that improve their labour (Burton et al 2005:2).

**Job satisfaction:** 85% of employees working in teams in EU15 countries<sup>9</sup> indicated that they were satisfied with their working environment. The survey also demonstrates that those who work in teams are more likely to be very satisfied with their current job than employees who do not do teamwork.

**Work-related stress:** Overall, the results of this survey “suggest a conflict between high performance practices and work-life balance policies and in particular showed that group working practices were playing a larger role in work demands”.

In interpreting all of the above, it is important to bear in mind that teamwork does not exist in isolation within the organisation. Rather, it works in synergy with all the characteristics of the organisational environment (Kyzlinková et al 2007).

In closing, Adams (2008:1) notes:

The challenge of building, sustaining, continually enhancing and improving great teams is fundamental to the economic well-being of any country and also to the happiness that people gain from work. It is no exaggeration to say that, if a large organisation could increase the effectiveness of its teams by about 10 percent (according to whichever method the corporation chooses to measure team efficiency), it would massively improve its bottom line ... The point is that teamwork is not, in fact, an option for a successful organisation, it's a necessity. Teamwork can lead to achievement, creativity, and energy levels that someone working alone, or perhaps with just one other person, could hardly imagine.

In the light of the above, the investment of Absa in their employees through the AICF could certainly be deemed as profitable. The process of team development as experienced by choir members in the AICF choirs could undoubtedly prove to be beneficial to the employees (choristers) and the organisation (Absa), alike. The potential of choir participation for fostering better team players and greater cooperation between people could be beneficial on societal level.

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<sup>9</sup> Member countries in the European Union prior to the accession of ten candidate countries on 1 May 2004. The EU15 comprised the following 15 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.



## Chapter 3

### Why Choir?

In considering choral singing for positive change on a societal level in South Africa, the following questions merit inquiry: 1. To what extent is choral singing an authentic and significant cultural practice in this country? 2. What, if any, are the inherent characteristics and additional benefits of singing that validate this practice as an appropriate activity to promote individual and societal wellbeing? 3. How does the practice of choir singing relate and apply to factors encumbering transformation in a country typified by considerable racial and cultural diversity? Evidence of the beneficial nature of music, and more specifically *choir participation*, is examined.

An opportunity to study the experiences of members participating in a choir exemplified by vast diversities in culture, language and age presents itself in a cross-national Theatre in Development project, the Winter-Summer Institute (WSI). This chapter concludes with the findings of a 2008 survey that probed for indicators for choir participation as a vehicle to facilitate social and cultural bridging as well as teambuilding.

### 3.1 Eminence of choral singing in South Africa

Loots<sup>10</sup> told me that he had come to believe that the saying “The three s’s of the people”, which refers to soccer, sex and singing, is a common idiom in the language of the people (Hugo 2007).

African music and dance has survived “as long as we can remember the existence of humankind” (Egbo et al s.a.). Dating back thousands of years, the music tradition in Southern Africa has always existed as an integral component of rituals such as birth, weddings, ancestral worship, initiation ceremonies and death – indeed, the people of this region “do not do anything without the accompaniment of song” (Ntaka 2003:2). In South Africa, unlike most other areas of sub-Saharan Africa, dance is usually

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<sup>10</sup> Inspector of Music in the previous Transvaal Department of Education in the Apartheid years.

accompanied by choral singing (MHSchool 2006). African music involves “the complete human being interacting with others of his group” (Sadie 2001:76). Levine (2005:21) notes that, in societies where a group dynamic permeates the culture, choral singing is a characterising element of the music. Considering the weight of group solidarity in Ubuntu, as underpinning philosophy of African identity, it is understandable that choral singing “is the most important musical feature of the black South African way of life” (Smith 1996).

South African ethnic groups are classified into four collective language groups namely the Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Shangaan Tsonga (Plaschke and Zirngibl 1992:20). The Nguni - encompassing IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, Seswati and IsiZulu speakers - have been actively involved in musicking since before the first foreign invasion of South Africa. The Sesotho group includes Southern Sesotho, Northern Sotho (Sepedi) and Setswana speakers: they have an equally lengthy history regarding music-making as an integral part of everyday life.

Choral singing is a customary practice in the Venda and Tsonga cultures. Blacking (2000:55) noted that music is a characteristic of almost every feature in Venda culture. It plays out in songs about animals, foods, emotions, greetings and departures, and songs that are associated with places, people and different jobs. In all of the four linguistic groups, it is customary that the community participates together in expression through singing at events like weddings, births, funerals and political marches. Some of the most moving of recent South African choral music grew out of political resistance and freedom songs (Smith 1996).

Choral singing is also prevalent amongst both English and Afrikaans Whites, as is evident in the many school, youth, university, church and amateur choirs in these communities. The vast majority of the previously white choirs have welcomed members from other cultural backgrounds into their choirs.

An additional, vibrant choral tradition and regular feature in the AICF is found in the cultural choirs of the Cape Malay. This choral practice originated when the Malaysian

slaves were brought to the Cape by the Dutch colonisers. Physically and culturally isolated, the slaves sang songs “conceived in bondage” and passed them on from generation to generation (Kamaldien 2002:3). Written in a mixture of Indonesian and Dutch, the songs were created for ‘get-together time’ like camping at the *kramat* (burial ground for a Muslim religious leader in Faure), weddings and funerals. Popular song types include the comic “*moppie* – a combined chorus”, and the *Nederlandse lied*<sup>11</sup>. The *Nederlandse liede* were the songs of the slaves, sung to keep them happy while they had to do hard labour (Kamaldien 2007:13). During Apartheid times, when political meetings were disbanded in the Cape Malay communities, choirs sang songs that made fun of the government - “That was our way to be outspoken” (Kamaldien 2002:3).

With exception of the Indian communities, choral singing is a customary practice in all the language and cultural groupings in South Africa and “the most important musical aspect in the country” (Barrett 2007:27). Smith (1996) agrees: “On the whole the general choral scene in South Africa is a lively and ever-improving one”.

The wide-ranging appeal of this musicking practice across cultural boundaries validates the use of choral singing for broader societal wellbeing in South Africa.

### **3.2 Singing: reasons and outcomes**

Human beings are designed and equipped for singing. Chapman notes that there exists no record of a human society without song (Davis and Chapman 1998:9). Davis (Davis and Chapman 1998:9) observes that even the most primitive cultures found in the most remote parts of the world “make particular kinds of sung sound when emotional”. She expounds: “for other primates (such as the chimpanzee) vocal sounds are always emotional and can rarely be inhibited”. Humans, on the other hand, can voluntarily control their breathing (within the limits set by the brain), inhibit emotional expression and recreate emotional experiences from memory. Such voluntary control skills are significant for singing and are “not seen in any other species”. Welch (2005:239)

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<sup>11</sup> Nederlandse lied/liede: Dutch song/songs.

identifies vocal sound as a defining feature of humanity, with its “commonality, plurality and development ” distinguishing elements of the human species.

Janice Chapman, Australian born singer, teacher and vocal consultant and recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia, who helped establish the multidisciplinary approach to the understanding, use and care of the voice in the United Kingdom, believes that human beings sing to communicate (Chapman 2006:17). Davis and Chapman (1998:9) perceive that singing usually appears when people come together for rituals – religious hymns, chants, emotional battle songs or sorrowful wailing, and also in group activities such as marching songs. Other reasons for singing are illustrated in the use of hymns for promoting a spiritual atmosphere, political songs for conveying subjective messages, chanting or lullabies for inducing certain states, or functional songs for achieving utilitarian outcomes as used in teaching. Singing is an act of musicking practiced by people everywhere, at all times, and in a wide range of contexts. People sing about the birth of a child and the loss of a loved one. Children and adults, young and old, male and female, sing when they are happy and when they are sad. In fact, singing might be more widespread than love (Weinberger 1996:1). People sing because they can. The singing of those who claim an inability to sing often stems from inhibitions taught through education, peer pressure and the perceptions of others. Chapman (2006:264) summarises: “Singing is not a cultural additive. It is a birthright which we are in danger of losing or devaluing”.

Singing holds numerous and wide-ranging benefits for the singer. Many claims of the improvements of physical, emotional and social wellbeing exist in anecdotal records and research literature. These include: singing stimulates the production of antibodies, thus lowering the likelihood of upper respiratory track infection, increasing lung function and breathing (Fanthome 2006). Singing makes you feel energised and uplifted as it releases endorphins into the singer’s system. It brings about positive mood changes and boosts the immune system (Kreutz et al 2004). Singing produces relaxation and stress relief, increases stamina and wields a remedial influence on factors that are potentially harmful to wellbeing and health (Clift et al 2007). In her autobiography *Singing Away the Hunger*, Mpho ‘M’atsepho Nthunya (1997:18) reflects:



I know many times there were no candles in the house, no paraffin. But ... there was a moon of light inside the house, there was much light. I wonder if it was my mother's prayers that made such beautiful light. Or maybe it was her singing.

Choral singing presents a forum for skilled and inexperienced singers alike to encounter such benefits. It also proffers a framework for meaningful social interaction. Social and emotional considerations are high-ranking reasons for joining a choir (Durrant and Himonides 1998:67). Putnam acknowledges the capacity of choral singing to promote social trust and reciprocity.

In "Singing as Communication" Graham Welch (2005:254) lists additional benefits of singing:

- Singing can be a form of group identification and social bonding. In choirs where significant diversity occurs, singing can also facilitate social bridging. Welch alludes to the use of "specially composed company songs" for reinforcing a senior management's definition of company culture. This is especially relevant to the Absa song, composed annually for the AICF;
- Singing can be a transformational activity culturally, through the fusion of elements presented in the music traditions of the diverse cultures within the choir;
- Singing can be used as an agent in the communication of social change.

Within the South African context where communication between groups is hampered by the inability to speak the others' languages, group singing offers an avenue for meaningful communication. Bannan and Montgomery-Smith (2008:73) note that, in comparison with language, singing can exhibit features of instinctive behaviour more holistically than speech as it is social in its capacity for 'recruitment survival': "Thus group singing might offer opportunities for the non-verbal exchange and communication of emotion...that compliments the use of language in adult social participation". In South Africa opportunities to allow ordinary citizens to sing songs which promote healing, hope and unity in choirs could facilitate singers to embrace a more wholesome South African

identity. Krajnc and Greenspoon (1997:6) reiterate this capacity that singing has to promote social change:

Protest music has often played a significant role in social change movements ... It has helped to form a new identity ... and has educated the public about social justice issues.

Investigating the scope and presence of choruses in American society, the 2002 Chorus America Impact Study shows that 23.5 million adult Americans were participants in choral activities at that time. The findings further reveal that more people in America participate in choral singing - within an estimated 250,000 choruses nationwide - than in any other performing art. The study resolves that choral singers help build strong communities and bridge social gaps. Choral singing also affords participants opportunities for personal growth and the vast majority of the choristers expressed the belief that choral participation inspires them to improve a range of skills useful in their social and professional interactions.

Pertinent to the AICF, development was reported in a number of areas significant to corporate working practices. These include: *teambuilding* (learning to cooperate and “to row in the same direction” ), *attention to detail*, improved capacity for *listening and following*, greater confidence for *social interaction*, *discipline* (for sustaining disciplined habits and commitments, as well as time management) and enhanced *creativity*. Unleashing creativity through choral singing is no minor feat, as highlighted in the following statement by Ged Davis, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum at the 2006 Annual Meeting:

It is imperative that we learn how to unleash our creative potential to tackle the world’s problems. The assumptions, tools and frameworks that business, government and civil society leaders have employed to make decisions over the past decade appear in need of renewal. To successfully meet the challenges we face will require an extraordinary collective response. At the centre of the response will be a greater emphasis on human imagination, innovation and creativity.

### 3.3 Choir participation and transformation

In his address to the nation on Heritage Day 2006, then President Mbeki stated:

We need to engage our musicians to ask them what their individual or collective role should be in making music one of the critical factors in dealing with our current socio-economic challenges (Mbeki 2006).

This thought resonates with Selimovič's (2002:73) conviction of the pungent position culture holds in a society: "It may be no exaggeration that without culture there could be neither democracy, peace, nor development".

Culture includes values and beliefs, such as "judgments of what is good or bad", and perceptions of fundamental truths about people and the world (Schein 1992). Perceptions are powerful and influential agents in determining how people live, experience their lives, define themselves and others, and make meaning of life. The significance of perceptions is substantiated by the theory of *salutogenesis*<sup>12</sup>, an alternative medicine approach that focuses on factors that support human health and wellbeing. Antonovsky, acclaimed American-Israeli medical sociologist and father of this theory, claims that the way people view their lives has a positive or negative influence on their physical and emotional life.

[Salutogenesis] is the process of enabling individuals, groups or societies to increase control over, and to improve their physical, mental, social and spiritual health. This could be reached by creating environments and societies characterized of clear structures and empowering environments where people see themselves as active participating subjects who are able to identify their internal and external resources, use and reuse them to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, to perceive meaningfulness and to change or cope with the environment in a health promoting manner (Eriksson and Lindström 2007:942).

The key concept of salutogenesis is the *sense of coherence* (SOC) which is applicable on individual, group and societal level. Antonovsky explains SOC as a global orientation to perceive the world and identifies three "salutory factors" in the SOC process namely:

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Taken from the Latin *salus* (health), and the Greek *genesis* (origin), *salutogenesis* refers to origins of health.

- Comprehensibility: the need to perceive and experience one's world and the stimuli (stressors/obstacles) it presents as understandable;
- Manageability: the sense that one has the ability to cope, based on the belief that needed resources (which can be one's own or those of "trustworthy others") are available; and
- Meaningfulness: experiences of the world as meaningful enable the individual to perceive stimuli as meaningful (Antonovsky 1990:3).

In South Africa, perceptions of others and the world are affected by the complexity of a diverse society in a young democracy. Putnam (2007) notes that the greater the racial diversity in a community, the weaker the trust on both inter- and intra-racial levels. In South Africa, the complications of inter-personal trust and connectedness are strengthened by people's frequent inability to speak and/or understand each others' languages. The failure to speak the languages of fellow South Africans is more prevalent amongst both Afrikaans and English speaking Whites than among Blacks. This could explain the observation that:

After twelve years of democracy, special barriers remain entrenched, albeit on a psychological level. White incursions into "black space" have not been matched by black movement into "white space" ... This means that opportunities to learn about black communicative practices (or experiences) in black people's own terms and turf are limited, thus hampering meaningful transformation (Mkhize 2007).

In consequence, restricted engagement with the others' (individuals from differing cultural/racial groupings) lifeworlds and cultural and communicative practices is maintained. Lomax (1968:17) observes that "predictable and universal relationships have been established between the expressive and communication processes, on the one hand, and social structure and culture pattern, on the other". In an environment<sup>13</sup> where restricted engagement with other lifeworlds occurs, perceptions of people from differing

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<sup>13</sup>

Environment: circumstances, influences, stresses, and competitive, cultural, demographic, economic, natural, political, regulatory, and technological factors (called environmental factors) that effect the survival, operations, and growth of an organisation (Businessdictionary.com).

cultural backgrounds are not rooted in experiential understanding; and thus stereotyping and prejudice are perpetuated. This situation (in which a large majority of South Africans find themselves) calls for an intervention which can facilitate shared cultural and communicative experiences to infiltrate the stereotyped perceptions. Group singing, renowned for its ability to establishing a sense of connection, offers an avenue for shared cultural and communicative experiences.

Bannan and Montgomery-Smith (2008:73) note that, in comparison with language, singing can exhibit features of instinctive behaviour more holistically than speech as it is social in its capacity for ‘recruitment survival’: “Thus group singing might offer opportunities for the non-verbal exchange and communication of emotion ... that complements the use of language in adult social participation”. Music is commonly referred to as a “universal language”, and as such is jointly accessible to all. As a fundamental channel of communication it provides a means by which people can share emotions, interpretations and meanings - even when their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible (Miell et al 2005:1). In South Africa choral (group) singing opportunities could allow ordinary citizens to sing songs which promote healing, hope and unity - thus facilitating singers to embrace a more wholesome South African identity. Neuroscientist Professor Aniruddah (Ani) Patel observes:

I think [music is] something that humans invented that actually changed our experience of the world and that is deeply important to people (Mitchell 2007).

Singing in a multi-cultural choir offers unique opportunities for choir members to experience each other’s expressive communication processes through the traditional songs of the cultures presented in the choir. These experiences can foster deeper understanding and so begin a process whereby perceptions of others and the world are modified.

Drawing from Antonovsky’s salutogenic model of health, a recent cross-national choral singing survey (Clift et al 2007) found that an overwhelming majority of the 1,124 participating respondents experienced choir participation as contributing to positive

experiences and perceptions which are contributors to a stronger “sense of coherence”(SOC). Eriksson and Lindström (2008:241) regard cultivating a stronger SOC as a process of enabling individuals, groups or societies to “improve their physical, mental, social and spiritual health ... by creating environments and societies ... where people see themselves as active participating subjects”.

The inherent potential in choir participation to facilitate such a process for choir members across language and cultural barriers is a prospect worth exploring.

### **3.4 Findings of the 2008 WSI choir survey**

The Winter-Summer Institute in Theatre for Development (WSI) is a collaborative endeavour of the following universities:

- Empire State College, State University of New York, U.S.A.
- National University of Lesotho, Roma, Lesotho
- University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

This multi-cultural initiative aims “to create collaborative, issue-based, aesthetically provocative theatre ... and to empower both students and community participants with the tools and resources necessary to create in their own communities and lives” (Winner and Lissard 2007). In 2006 and 2008 the project focused on the role of customary practices in the spread of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho. As part of the lecturing staff, the writer’s role in the project is to incorporate all the student actors in a WSI choir, and direct the choral singing to enhance the message conveyed through theatre.

The WSI choir is equivalent to the AICF in that it is comprised of members of dissimilar backgrounds re culture, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, educational qualification, age, music proficiency and levels of experience in singing. Within a set of circumstances, specific to the project, the WSI choir evolves. For the first leg of the project students and lecturers from the above mentioned institutions convene in Roma, Lesotho. Informed by literature research, presentations and interviews with community



members living with AIDS, a realistic theatrical production is developed to reflect issues impacting the spread of, and obstacles of living with, HIV/AIDS in the Lesotho context. At this point the choir, consisting of all the participating students, is launched. Typically, a notable number of these students have no prior experience of choral singing with some expressing the belief that they cannot sing at all. A repertoire of songs that can be related to the context of the developing play, as well as the circumstances and beliefs of the community, is developed. Mostly Sesotho songs are learnt, as well some English.

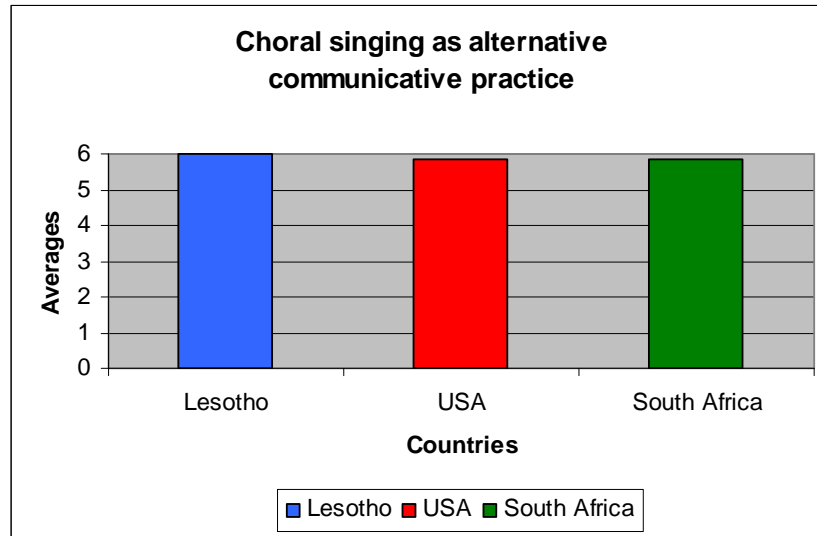
After a series of performances in the communities of Roma and Maseru, this multi-cultural company travels to Malealea, a remote valley in the mountains of Lesotho to form a junction with forty members of the various villages in the valley. Communicative practices are complicated by the villagers' inability to speak or understand English, at a point when students have to apply acquired skills for developing community theatre in a fresh collaborative endeavour. The new work is to portray and interpret the life-experiences of the new members and in doing so authentically reflects HIV/AIDS-related issues specific to the rural Malealea setting.

After the closing ceremony for the 2008 project, students were invited to participate in a brief questionnaire on their choral experience. The questionnaire was limited to four questions pertaining to the focus of this thesis. To correlate with the AICF survey questionnaires, participants had to select one of the following six Likert scale options:

- 1: *Most definitely not;*
- 2: *Definitely not;*
- 3: *No;*
- 4: *Yes;*
- 5: *Yes, definitely;* and
- 6: *Yes, most definitely.*

The following graphs represent the average score per participating school.

Question 1: Did you experience singing in a choir with fellow WSI members of different mother tongues as a communicative practice shared by all?



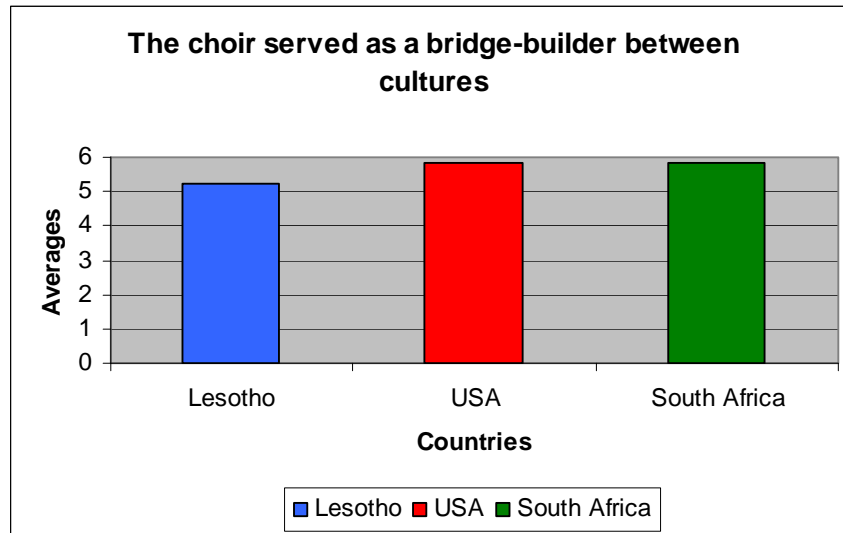
In this graph it is significant that:

- Lesotho students allocated that “Yes, most definitely” (six out of six) the choir was a communicative experience with students who did not speak Sesotho;
- The second highest average score (5.86 out of six) was allocated by the South Africans – amongst whom 75% of the students could at least understand Sesotho and were familiar with the context, meaning and movements of the songs;
- The American delegation – who had to learn all the Sesotho songs, pronunciation of the words and accompanying movements - assigned the lowest score: 5.84 out of six.

It is thus clear that all students from the three different countries (representing two different continents) experienced a shared communicative practice through choral singing.

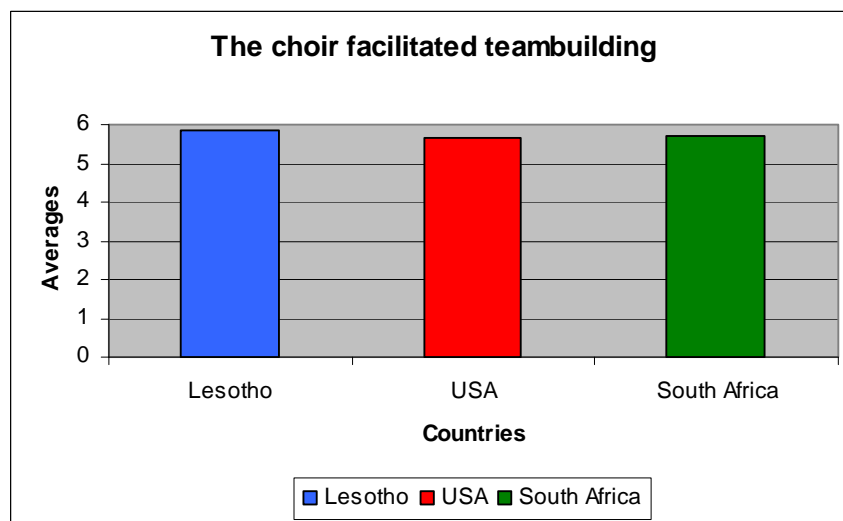


Question 2: Did choir participation serve as a meaningful bridge-builder between the different cultures contained by the WSI project?



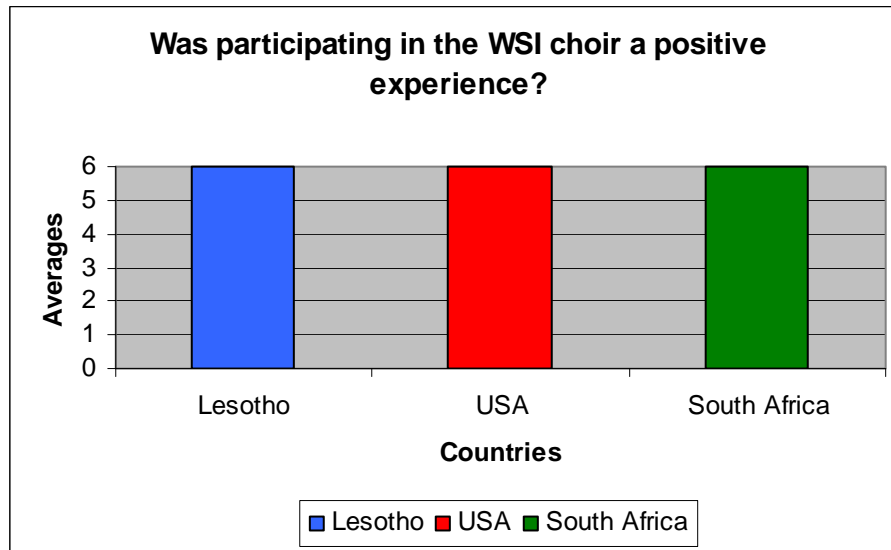
The above reflects that the foreign students (USA and South Africa) benefited more by the bridge building capabilities of choral singing – accessing a different culture through choral singing.

Question 3: Did the choral process facilitate teambuilding between the three schools participating in this collaboration?



In taking responsibility for sharing and teaching cultural songs (both language and musical elements) it is clear that, through choral singing, the opportunity to share own cultural artifacts, as well as the consequent responsibilities associated with this role transpired as a great teambuilding experience for the Lesotho contingent.

Question 4: On a personal level, was the choir participation a positive experience?



It is significant that all respondents (including those who initially were negative about singing in the choir and believed that they could not sing) judged their WSI choral participation as positive experience on a personal level. All participants indicated “Yes, most definitely so” - a 100% score of six out of six.

After each question, space was provided for participants to write comments should they wish to do so. The following tables reflect some of the significant comments given:



Question 1: Communicative practice

I believe the choir was actually the place where we gained the most trust in regards to the differing languages present within the WSI – Ed, USA.

Oh absolutely. It is communication in itself – Katt, USA.

I feel it allowed us to move beyond the language status – the ego. The loss we feel when confronted with the new languages in the group – having to understand another’s mother tongue – well, the music accommodated moving us to comfort. For me it moved us to generosity: each person had a responsibility to teach aspects of their cultural music in the choir, and as one we embraced all of this – Selloane, Lesotho.

The atmosphere that it created: it became a love thing. People give and receive in a loving atmosphere – Li, Lesotho.

Question 2: Bridge builder

Absolutely, again for the reasons listed above in regard to language and also because we got to explore each other’s cultural similarities and differences within the lyrics of the songs we played with – Ed, USA.

Learning and performing music from other cultures allows the student to have an internal visceral experience with the languages and values of those cultures. This experience is unique because it internalizes this new cultural information before it can be analyzed or critiqued. Attempts at cultural understanding become more meaningful when this personal experience is considered, as the gap between self and other is bridged through the power of the song – Deanna, USA.

Absolutely. If I didn’t know the meaning of a song, or how to pronounce words that were non-English, the students from other cultures and countries made themselves available to



help. A lot of time was spent bonding with others when they explained lyrics of messages of songs, the history of the song and/or its place in their culture and society. These moments became opportunities to learn about each other – Denise, USA.

Absolutely, but beyond bridge-builder: it went deeper – Katt, USA,

I now want to take those who say that Whites feel superior to task. This was a reminder that we are all God’s children – everything fell off and we became one through the joy and the love generated through the singing together. And for the people in South Africa who speak 11 different languages – we can use this kind of choir singing as a catalyst: the word of the sons to heal – Selloane, Lesotho.

It very much opened my heart to the people from other cultural backgrounds. I got the feeling of appreciation for and from them – very much so. Some of these English speakers were trying so very hard to sing our songs and do our movements as we do – it was beautiful – Li, Lesotho.

It makes me feel so happy, you know, very happy. Ed (New York) was trying so hard. It opens my heart. It shows appreciation and willingness – he acknowledged that we exist. And he worked so hard, he could tell me what all the songs mean. It is definitely a bridge-builder. I was like “Aaaaaah” – Popa, Lesotho.

Yes, absolutely. And yes because we open up to people of other cultural backgrounds when we try, through the choir songs in each other’s languages, to get the same expression in one voice – you all really got into the [Sesotho] language FEEL through the singing. Singing together bridges cultures because you get the meaning, the feel, the rhythm of the language – Ntsele, Lesotho.

Loving it! Most exhilarating seeing a lot of people willing to learn songs from our cultures in our languages. Once people try and persist – the mere fact that they are willing to try - to me that was like “wow!” – Linda, IsiZulu speaking South African.



Question 3: Teambuilding

One of the strongest tool for re-focusing, re-balancing as a rest point. It was a great strength in our endeavour and, I feel, our best art – Katt, USA.

For me it gave me a goal that got me outside myself and gave me a feeling of being a part of the whole. Also the individual elements within each song – such as bass, tenor, instruments, etc. gave one a sense of being connected to a team within the whole of the choir – Ed, USA.

I loved trying to muddle through songs when I couldn't quite pick up all of the words. I would look to my friends and try to follow along with their words, much to our general amusement, they would over-enunciate so I could try to get it and then giggle when they heard my own pronunciation, all in all it was great fun whilst teaching us to rely on each other – Deanna, USA.

Question 4: Positive personal experience

[Participating in the choir] made me feel capable, and even confident in an area where I have almost no prior experience. Also, the choir practices, especially those at the end of the day were often what saved me from utter depression after dealing with intense and painful subjects all day long. I can't thank you enough for providing me with this wonderful experience – Deanna, USA.

I can only say that for me it was transformative. At 52 I have had a phobia of singing for my entire life. On Tuesday last I attended my first voice lesson at a conservatory near my home in Brooklyn New York. After hearing tales of the Simmer WSI Choir and then warming me up, my new instructor had me sing a song and I didn't do half bad. In fact I



was sufficient enough that she asked me to repeat it and at the end said she was quite impressed. With that this old guy began to cry. The choir this past summer was beyond a doubt a gift given to me that I will never forget – Ed, USA.

As someone who never thought of myself as a “singer,” I felt differently after [participating in the WSI Choir] ... With just a few technique suggestions, my identity as a “singer” transformed. I have to say that the choir rehearsals and performances were some of the most positive, memorable and moving experiences I had during my time in Lesotho. (And in my life!) – Denise, USA.

And how everybody’s confidence was enhanced through the singing. I think of how one of our Basotho students cried so much at our final farewell and I know: she got an important role as soloist in the choir and it brought so much to her life and her confidence – Selloane, Lesotho.

Based on his career of thirty years as psychiatrist, Gary G. May (2007:5) observes that grace is the greatest transformational force available. The above comments clearly reflect that participating in the choir afforded WSI students opportunities for experiencing and sharing grace.

The opportunity for sharing grace as a transformational force is firmly presented in the AICF. The next chapter will depict choral singing and the AICF in the Absa context.

## Chapter 4

### **Absa and the Absa Internal Choir Festival**

Chapter 3 explored the benefits of choral singing pertaining to individual and societal wellbeing; and its relevance and significance for transformation and teambuilding. In this chapter a portrayal of Absa Bank, and the birth and development of the choir project depicts the AICF within its corporate context. The 2005-2008 Absa songs are described in terms of intention and purpose. To illuminate a number of cases discussed, the reader is referred to a number of revealing glimpses of the 2005-2008 AICF, as captured on the supplementary DVD.

Related information was gathered through continuous interviews, Absa documents and records, the Absa website and other financial sources available on the internet.

#### **4.1 Absa Bank: a synopsis**

As a major role player in the South African economy, Absa is an impressive, multi-dimensional corporate organism which merits proper introduction.

Absa is the biggest retail bank in South Africa and one of the country's largest financial services groups with a vision to become the pre-eminent bank in South Africa and on the African continent. Renowned for its catchphrase *Today, Tomorrow, Together*, the organisation has distinguished itself as a leading role player and common entity in South African civic life as, amongst other:

- Top banking brand in South Africa (Fin.24.com 2006);
- Major investor in social responsibility programmes;
- Major sponsor for sports in South Africa (Absa Currie Cup (rugby), Absa Premier Cup (soccer), the South African Olympic team and the 2010 Soccer World Cup);
- Official sponsor of Bafana Bafana (South African national soccer team);

- The only financial institution in the world that has actively embraced art as part of its corporate image; presenting the richest art competition in Africa which owns the second biggest financial corporate art collection in the world next to Deutsche Bank;
- Owner of the only banking and money museum in South Africa and in that capacity the guardian of South Africa's banking history (which includes the economic, political and social changes reflected in the countries currencies);
- Official sponsor of national arts festivals such as the *KKNK*; and
- Sponsor of the evergreen music game show (32 seasons - the longest running programme in the history of South African television) *Noot vir Noot*.

Listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as *Absa Group Limited*, it offers a unique range of banking, bancassurance<sup>14</sup> as well as wealth management products and services. Absa primarily conducts its business in South Africa and on the African continent where it has equity holdings in Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania and Namibia (Mageza 2006:2). The Namibia Economist reports that Absa will become Namibia's fifth commercial bank in 2009 (Kaira 2008). At 30 June 2008, the Absa Group had an asset base of R737 ,6 billion; 680,1 million shares in issue; a market capitalisation of R55,8 billion; 9.4 million customers in South Africa alone and a sum total of 1 176 points of presence with 40 011 permanent employees (Abs(a) s.a.).

## 4.2 Origins: a journey of change

The history of Absa Bank typifies a corporate journey of transition and transformation spurring from a series of merges and subsequent organisational changes. In 1991 the Amalgamated Banks of South Africa Limited (Absa) was formed through the merger a number of banks: *UBS (United Building Society) Holdings, Allied and Volkskas Groups* and certain interests of the *Sage Group*. In 1992 Absa extended their asset base further when they acquired the collective shareholding of the *Bankorp Group* - consisting of

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<sup>14</sup> Bancassurance is the selling of insurance and banking products through the same channel, most commonly through bank branches selling insurance (Pietersz 2006).



*Trust Bank, Senbank and Bankfin*. In 1998 all former brands were consolidated into a single Absa brand, the company adopted a new corporate identity and, at the same time, the name of the holding company, *Amalgamated Banks of South Africa Limited*, was changed to *Absa Group Limited*.

On 27 July 2005 Absa became a subsidiary of Barclays Bank PLC with Barclays acquiring a controlling stake (57%) in the Absa Group. Barclays stated that “the transaction was the largest ever foreign direct investment in South Africa” and that Absa “is a valuable addition to the Barclays Group” (BBC 2005).

### **4.3 Absa in the South African context**

In terms of its role in South African society, Absa is committed to promoting the upliftment and empowering of the communities in which it operates. To help communities reach their full potential, a focus is placed on developmental initiatives around early childhood development, education, job creation and HIV/AIDS (Absa (b) s.a.). The following encapsulates Absa’s philosophy on social investment:

Absa is one of South Africa's largest financial institutions. Such a market position brings a certain amount of responsibility. This means that the Group has a duty to create value not only for its current stakeholders, but also for future generations. Absa aims to achieve this by being a good corporate citizen <sup>15</sup>(Absa (a) s.a.).

In December 2007, through an annual survey among 100 leading companies as well as 100 Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) <sup>16</sup>, the Absa Group was voted the best financial institution for its corporate social investment (CSI) practices. Other accolades included special recognition for most strongly involving employees in CSI activities; and a special

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<sup>15</sup> “Corporate citizenship, as defined by the World Economic Forum, is the contribution a company makes to society through its business activities, its social investment and philanthropy programmes and its engagement in public policy” (Absa.(c) s.a.).

<sup>16</sup> Survey conducted by Trialogue, a black-empowered consulting, publishing and research organisation specializing in areas of sustainable business and corporate social investment (CSI) *Leading the way in CSI 2007*.



award for consistently remaining amongst the top three CSI organisations over the past eight years. Absa Group Executive for Group Public Affairs, Riah Phiyega notes:

At the core of our approach is a sincere effort to contribute to the improvement of the human condition ... Beyond Absa's core CSI, the company also has a proud tradition of employee community development. Committed Absa staff throughout the country work tirelessly and on their own initiative to support our CSI efforts and to increase our impact (2007).

It may be no coincidence that the AICF successfully plays off within an organisation where values and social responsibilities enjoy such precedence on the corporate agenda. The AICF is an initiative which not only allows Absa employees to invest in community development, but also in their own *Absa community*.

#### **4.4 Absa and the Absa Internal Choir Festival**

The AICF has its origin with Dr. Steve F. Booysen, the Group Chief Executive of Absa Bank since August 2004. Booysen, DCom (Acc), CA (SA) is an Honorary Professor in Accountancy at the University of Pretoria with a longstanding career in the bank. This has afforded him firsthand experience of the realities of working in a bank, as well as the effect of mergers and acquisitions on employees.

Earlier in 2004, Booysen witnessed a group of Absa employees spontaneously form a choir during the farewell function for his predecessor in the Limpopo Province. In South Africa – where choral singing as collective expression is a common practice in many of the cultures - such impromptu choral activities are not out of the ordinary. Booysen had never been especially fond of choral music – “Until I heard our Absa choirs, I had never really liked choral music or attended choir performances” (2007). However, Booysen was impressed by the enjoyment, positive spirit and camaraderie evident in the Limpopo impromptu choir. He has often commented that this experience was the fore-runner to the AICF. Concerned for the morale of Absa employees during the impending merge with

Barclays, Booysen initiated the AICF as a tool for team- and morale building for Absa employees, envisaging the project as a vehicle for:

- bringing about a greater sense of spiritual and emotional balance in the lives of Absa employees;
- developing a greater sense of belonging to the “Absa family”;
- fostering an understanding of, sense of pride in and respect for the richness of our South African cultural diversity;
- encouraging the sense of “Absa pride”;
- creating “human pathways” between employees from different divisions and levels in the bank; and
- affording employees opportunities to have fun (Booyesen 2005-2008: DVD tracks 2-5).

Booyesen believed that by facilitating the above through the AICF, Absa clients could be warranted more positive service experiences when being served by more fulfilled and happy tellers and consultants. He further saw the AICF as a vehicle which proffered him, as newly appointed Group Chief Executive, the opportunity for interacting with employees across all levels of appointment:

As CEO of a big corporate organisation, one soon realises that you do not necessarily know what is going on in the organisation. Why? Because there are hierarchical structures and as soon as one moves outside the box regarding these structures, people start feeling uncomfortable ... that is just human. What one does next, is to design ways of interacting with your people in ways that are safe and uplifting for all (Interview: 2007).

Booyesen discussed his vision with Annemarie Mostert (Head: Protocol and Public Relations) and requested her to develop and manage the project. Mostert, former music teacher and founder of the National Eisteddfod Academy (NEA) was an experienced organiser of arts activities and music festivals. She further held well established networks with music practitioners in diverse cultural communities in Gauteng. An advocate of the value of music in society, she was enthused by the prospect of an internal choral project: “My first reaction? I thought *wow*; finally a corporate organisation is catching up!”

(2006). The value of the social and cultural capital owned by Mostert was an enabling factor in the development of the AICF. She relates the relevancy of a choir project at that moment in Absa as follows:

Just place this choir competition in the bigger picture – the Absa picture. Remember now that within the first 10 years of democracy in South Africa, Absa is undergoing a great deal of transformation. Firstly the four brands are amalgamated. This amalgamation is still at a sensitive stage when a new Group Chief Executive is appointed and the Barclays development is announced! This new leader is young, has a funky way about doing business in a domain of *work hard, play hard*. He is adamant that the Absa team has to be developed and that employees must have fun while the team is being built. So he initiates the choir project to support both the process and the employee in a comfortable, playful, different yet meaningful way (Mostert 2006).

Mostert developed the AICF concept, code of conduct, and rules and regulations. The development of musical aspects (such as training of choirs and acquiring an originally composed *Absa song* as prescribed work for the competition) was outsourced to an external service provider, the NEA. Dr. Francois van den Berg, Director of the NEA, assumed responsibility and successfully assisted in the training of the Absa choirs across all provinces in South Africa for the 2005 and 2006 AICF<sup>17</sup>. The writer was commissioned to compose the first Absa song and so her involvement in the AICF commenced.

#### **4.5 Absa and the Absa song**

Welch (2005:254) notes that the use of *specially composed company songs* to reinforce company culture exemplifies singing as a form of group identification and social bonding. Former President Mbeki reflects on the role of music as a tool to shape the broader society:

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<sup>17</sup> Since 2007 the writer has taken up responsibility for these choirs.

Indeed, music permeates all walks of life and has been a powerful instrument and a tool commonly invoked in various occasions and circumstances, good and bad, joyful and sorrowful ... In different social contexts and situations, music has served and serves today to sooth the troubled soul, lift the dejected spirit, and celebrate the very joy of being human ... We need to engage our musicians to ask them what their individual or collective role should be in making music one of the critical factors in dealing with our current socio-economic challenges (2006).

There are very few activities that engage the whole brain. Music is such an exercise. It is therefore explicable that singing together about important issues is more persuasive than talking together about the same. Music is particularly renowned for its capacity to intensify emotions, focus and unify groups of people toward a common goal. Through this capacity of music has been used in religious and cultural practices. Through the ages this capability to energise and impel has been utilised to prime soldiers for battles in war situations. Stirred by the swaying beat of drums, many a soldier have been enabled to walk for many miles, focused on the battle ahead and enthused to obtain the victory. In recent history the advertising industry has exploited this capability inherent in music to impact a consumerist society to the benefit of countless clients.

Ernst Primosch, Vice President Corporate Communications of Henkel International, supports this view. He explains: “Corporate identity is a very decisive factor for a company. A shared song reminds people of corporate values” (Henkel s.a.). When I was approached to compose the first Absa song for the 2005 AICF, the idea of *corporate song as prescribed work for a choir competition* was not a familiar concept to me. Absa expressed the wish that the Absa song would encompass the following objectives:

- Building the greater Absa team;
- Celebrating the diverse South African cultures;
- Promoting transformation (unity in diversity);
- Utilising different South African languages; and
- Promoting the Absa brand.

A challenging factor in composing music for the AICF is the fact that this choir project is designed for ordinary bank employees – many of whom had never sung in a choir before. As the overwhelming majority of choir members have never received any formal music training and other than tonic sol-fa, music literacy is practically non-existing. Typically, the Absa choirs are formed after the composition for that year has been completed. The song may be arranged for a four part choir while in some choirs there might not be sufficient male voices for both tenor and bass lines. Further, there is no way of telling whether the male employees who join choirs will be tenors or basses. The harmonic arrangement (SATB) has to be written in such a way that the song would still “work” (sound acceptable) if sung by either SAT or SAB. The song also needs to allow for the possible lack of experience in choral singing and voice training (which can be expected in a corporate banking organisation) re range (pitch), rhythmic, melodic as well as harmonic difficulty. Notwithstanding all of the above challenges, it is crucial to create a song that appeals to AICF participants of different cultural, age and language groupings. The Absa song has to speak to and motivate employees to participate and commit to the process of the AICF.

In the compositions of the past four Absa songs, I have endeavoured to incorporate the objectives proposed by Absa. A constant theme in the songs is that of taking ownership for the change needed in South African society. This is a common thread through all the songs, illustrated in some of the words/phrases used in this regard: *work, dream, hope, give, pray, give, take my hand, let's be a nation*. Booyesen (2007) notes: “I would say the message is: be committed, be passionate, practice spirituality - all religions have the same core”. Since the first composition in 2005, it has been my aim to encompass all these aspects and objectives, utilising a broad scope of moods, such as joyful, tender, exuberant and hopeful, within the framework of uplifting, inspiring and enjoyable (*fun*) songs.

I have further tried to reflect the spirit of the *core Absa values*, which encapsulate Absa morals, attitudes and philosophy. These are:

- Value our people and treat them with fairness;

- Demonstrate integrity in all our actions;
- Strive to exceed the needs of our customers;
- Take responsibility for the quality of our work; and
- Display leadership in all we do (Absa (a) s.a.).

To maintain an element of challenge and accommodate musical and intellectual growth - and because I am a music educator at heart - I have increased the level of difficulty of the choir songs from year to year. This is evident in the use of the following elements of music:

- Melody - 2007: disjunct intervals, including the challenging major 7<sup>th</sup> (2007); chromatic movement (2008);
- Harmony - increased use of modulation, dissonance, chromaticism;
- Tonality - sections in minor keys (2008) which would not have been viable in 2005;
- Rhythm – increased use of syncopation;
- Time – increased metre changes; and
- Dynamics – increased challenges posed re dynamic contrasts.

#### **- Absa song 2005**

The message of the Absa song for the 2005 AICF evolved around the Absa slogan *Today, Tomorrow, Together*. The dominant language of the song is English, but phrases in IsiXhosa, Afrikaans and IsiZulu are included. In writing the lyrics of the 2005 AICF Absa song, it was important for me to convey an encouraging message of unity, hope, acceptance of fellow South Africans and respect for women and children. The song consists of three contrasting sections (contrasts in tempo, time, tonality and tone colour) and the structure is ABCB. The first AICF Absa song, *We Shall Stand* – sung by the massed choir and soloist Sibongile Khumalo – is available on the supplementary DVD: Scene 6.

### **- Absa song 2006**

In 2006 I chose an Afrikaans folk song (*Al lê die berge nog so blou*) as point of departure for the composition. The original words were adapted and translated in IsiZulu (*Tomorrow is like a mountain; let's conquer it, even if it is hard*). When repeated in Afrikaans, a tenor pedal point-type, repetitive motive is added against the melody, calling “let's work” in four different African languages and sung by the tenors. After a modulation, motives from the well known *Shosholozza* are placed as contrast to the Afrikaans folk melody (sung by the basses). Scene 7 on the DVD portrays the massed choir performance of the 2006 AICF song, *Tomorrow Calling Today*, sung by the Absa massed choir with soloists Sibongile Ngoma and Joseph Clarke.

### **- Absa song 2007**

The 2007 song centered around a Sesotho folk song, *Seanna Marena* (Royal Blanket). The song contains English, IsiZulu and Sesotho languages. Intended to challenge participants and listeners to dare to dream about a peaceful and prosperous country for young and old, the song consists of four sections of contrasting sound colour: A: *Imagine if we dare to dream*; B: IsiZulu – *Let's be as one*; C: Sesotho folk song, words adapted - *Dreams shape reality*; and D - *Rise up*. Structure: ABCAD. The massed choir rendition of the 2007 Absa song, *Seanna Marena sa Tshepo* (Royal blanket of hope) can be viewed in Scene 8. A recording of the 2007 Absa song, sung by massed choir with soloists Alma Oosthuizen and Granville Michaels, can be viewed on the DVD: Scene 7.

### **- Absa song 2008**

The 2008 song was intended to be a celebration of life. With seven South African languages, many modulations, key and time changes, many choir organisers were convinced that their choirs would never be able to master this song. The Absa employees have responded whole-heartedly to this festival and have grown tremendously in their musical abilities. Intonation, rhythm, phrasing, interpretation and even voice ranges have



developed notably over the span of four years since the first AICF in 2005. The song consists of an Introductory phrase – repetitive descending motive; Section A, Section B (minor key), Repetitive descending motive, A repeated (new key, new lyrics, new language); Section D and concluding motive (ascending motive repeated: *Today, Tomorrow, Together*). The 2008 Absa song, *Choose Life*, can be viewed on the DVD, Scene 8.

Over the years, the commitment and passion of AICF participants have been astounding. Not only have they mastered the song each year, they also wholeheartedly bought into the message of the songs, appropriating the words to their own lives and circumstances, and also to those of the South African society. This supports Mbeki's observation that the songs sung during the years of struggle against Apartheid stayed with people, more than the lessons taught by mothers or teachers (2006). An example of how the meaning of a choral song can be appropriated to real life situations was presented during the time of the xenophobic violence which occurred in South Africa in 2008. Gumede (2008) notes: "The song is what we need to sing now – the line 'love this moment; love yourself; love those who are different from you' [Sesotho: *Rata hona jwale; ithate; rata bang ba sa tswaneng le wena*] is what we must sing now – it speaks to us now".

#### **4.6 Absa Internal Choir Festival: passion and commitment**

Booyesen (2006, 2008 - DVD: Scenes 3 and 5) states that the AICF has "exceeded all expectations" in terms of teambuilding, transformation and leadership. A number of informative interviews with Absa managers (including Provincial Managers) and other role players (such as music specialists from the community) involved with four choirs from three South African provinces are recorded in Scenes 18-21 on the DVD. Scene 19 exhibits particular creative leadership and problem solving skills developed to overcome obstacles in the Northern Cape choir (Scene 19: Northern Cape).

The passion and commitment exhibited by the Absa choir members have been commendable. Since the advent of the first AICF (2005), I have recorded numerous

interviews and experiences which revealed the passion and commitment of Absa choir members to the AICF. Supported by the interviews on the DVD (Scenes 18-21), the following narratives reflect that choir participation can facilitate:

- Developing commitment, perseverance and leadership skills;
- Developing creative problem-solving skills;
- Improved appreciation for language and cultural diversity;
- A suitable activity for both able and disabled employees; and
- Networking and mutual support between able and disabled as well as choir members from different racial, language and cultural backgrounds.

After the first provincial final in Gauteng, a branch manager came to see me in my office with John, the conductor of a choir which did not make it through to the final round of the 2005 AICF. The failure to go through to the final round of the 2005 AICF had left John feeling devastated and disillusioned. He avidly vowed that he would “never in his life” participate in the AICF again - the sense of loss experienced by himself and his fellow choir members by not being part of the final leg of the competition, was “simply not worth it”. However, the following year the same choir (with John as conductor) participated again. They worked extremely hard, took careful note of all adjudicator comments of the previous year and went on to win the 2006 Gauteng provincials. While preparing for the 2007 AICF finals (they had once again been the winning choir in Gauteng) John remarked: “ I have learnt one of the most valuable lessons in my life: when I don’t win, it does not mean that I am a loser. I am a winner, whether I win or lose in life. And in learning this, I have learnt perseverance. And hope. I have learnt such a lot”.

In Cape Town, a discussion with members of the choir which was to represent the Western Cape at the 2007 AICF final revealed the following: every morning choir members take turns to send a greeting (in English) to all the choir members via e-mail. The different mother tongue speakers then translate this greeting into the different languages and forward it to the other members. Choir members study the “greeting for the day” in all the languages presented in the choir. Through this exercise, choir members

have the opportunity to acquire basic language skills, and also greater understanding of appreciation for other cultures represented in the choir. In the same discussion choir members expressed their excitement about a big function organised by the choir which was to take place that evening. The purpose of the function was to raise money to support a disabled choir member who had been selected for the national *Wheelchair Bowling* team. As no sponsorship was available for the team's forthcoming test match in Europe, the choir had taken it upon themselves to do fundraising in this regard. They were convinced that, after that evening's function, they would have raised all the money needed by their fellow choir member for the planned tour. A few weeks after this discussion, the same Western Cape choir was announced as the overall winners of the 2007 AICF. Audio-visual images on the DVD: Scene 14; as well as Scene 18: track 3, allow the viewer glimpses of the spirit and camaraderie between the members of this choir.

In conclusion: early one Sunday morning in 2006, upon arrival at the venue for the choir workshop/practice in a bitterly cold Kimberley (Northern Cape), I found two young ladies sitting outside the locked door, observably tired. Upon inquiring, they explained: They live 725km from Kimberley, do not own cars and public transport to Kimberley is practically non-existent over weekends. As they did not want to arrive late for the practice, they had hitch-hiked through the night and had been sitting outside the venue since before dawn that morning. They were about to participate in a six hour training session, after which they would have to find another lift home – 725 kilometres away. The exact motivation for this kind of sacrificial behaviour is not clear. However, it is clear that the choir had facilitated deep commitment to the common goal of the group in the true spirit of Ubuntu.

#### **4.7 The DVD**

It is difficult to adequately describe the emotive response of Absa employees to the AICF; audio-visual rendering is possibly a better medium to convey the passion, fun and commitment experienced by AICF participants. With permission from Absa, pertinent



scenes from Absa records of the 2005-2008 AICF (recorded for Absa by *Showgroup*<sup>18</sup>, the events managing company for the AICF) were selected to compile a supplementary DVD. The DVD affords some telling glimpses of different aspects of the AICF process and contains examples of the choral music of different cultural groups. Material on the DVD was selected.

The DVD consists of 22 scenes:

- Scene 1: Introductory video footage to the first AICF final
- Scene 2-5: Opening speeches of Steve Booyesen at the opening of 2005-2008 AICF finals:
- Scene 6-9: 2005-2008 Absa songs
- Scene 10-17: Best Choir and Most Popular Choir: 2005 -2007
- Scene 18-21: Interviews
- Scene 22: National Anthem of South Africa.

The *Scene selection* option in the main menu allows for easy access to specific scenes. Scenes are also presented as *Chapters* if viewed on computer.

**DVD Content:**

Scene 1.....	Introduction to the 2005 AICF final
Scene 2.....	Booyesen speech: 2005
Scene 3.....	Booyesen speech: 2006
Scene 4.....	Booyesen speech: 2007
Scene 5.....	Booyesen speech: 2008
Scene 6.....	Absa song: 2005
Scene 7.....	Absa song: 2005
Scene 8.....	Absa song: 2005
Scene 9.....	Absa song: 2005

<sup>18</sup> *Showgroup* (Pty) Ltd available at [www.showgroupworld.com](http://www.showgroupworld.com).



Scene 10.....	Winning choir 2005
Scene 11.....	Most popular choir: 2005
Scene 12.....	Winning choir 2006
Scene 13.....	Most popular choir: 2006
Scene 14.....	Winning choir 2007
Scene 15.....	Most popular choir: 2007
Scene 16.....	Winning choir 2008
Scene 17.....	Most popular choir: 2008
Scene 18.....	Interviews: KwaZulu-Natal <i>(Drakensburg Valley Voices)</i>
Scene 19.....	Interviews: Northern Cape <i>(Northern Cape Diamonds)</i>
Scene 20.....	Interviews: Western Cape <i>(Rainbow Sonatas)</i>
Scene 21.....	Interviews: KwaZulu-Natal <i>(Simunye)</i>
Scene 22.....	National Anthem of South Africa <i>(Absa 2008 Massed Choir).</i>

An organisation willing to dedicate a significant financial investment to the development of human and cultural capital of employees merits recognition. The success of the AICF and its significance to the participating Absa employee endorse the respect which the bank has earned in the market. Absa is renowned for making a positive difference in the communities where it operates. The accompanying DVD illustrates that Absa’s investment in their staff through the AICF, is making a positive difference within the *Absa* community.

The results of the survey on the effect of the AICF on participating Absa employees are introduced and interpreted in the following Chapter (5).

## Chapter 5

### Interpreting the Data

#### 5.1 Introduction

The questionnaires were the main instrument for data collection. In sum the outcomes of the questionnaires reflect the perceptions of 755 respondents over three interventions. These perceptions are reflected on the bar graphs, tables and graphs presented in this chapter. The first and second interventions (I<sub>1</sub> and I<sub>2</sub>) took place in 2006 and data obtained through these two interventions (631 respondents) should be regarded as the core of the survey. The third intervention (I<sub>3</sub>) occurred in 2008 and was launched on a much smaller scale. The purpose of a third intervention was to serve as 1) a yardstick for assessing the sustainability of the Absa choir project through comparing the 2006 outcomes to outcomes obtained two years further into the AICF process; 2) a means of triangulation in the research and 3) a way of ensuring that the research study remains actual and current upon completion. The I<sub>3</sub> data is based on the perceptions of 124 respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections, A, B and C. In section A, background information was obtained to establish respondent profiles. Section B tested AICF participants' experiences of the AICF in terms of six factors (objectives of the AICF) identified by Absa. In section C three open-ended questions allowed respondents to express their personal views on what they considered to be obstacles, achievements and benefits to the individual in the AICF.

Due to the large number of graphs utilised to reflect the outcomes of Section A and B of the questionnaire, graphs (and supplementary tables clarifying data in graphs) are numbered as *figure 1-55b*. A sequential index of all graphs and tables found in Chapter 5 is provided at the end of the document (Appendix 2).

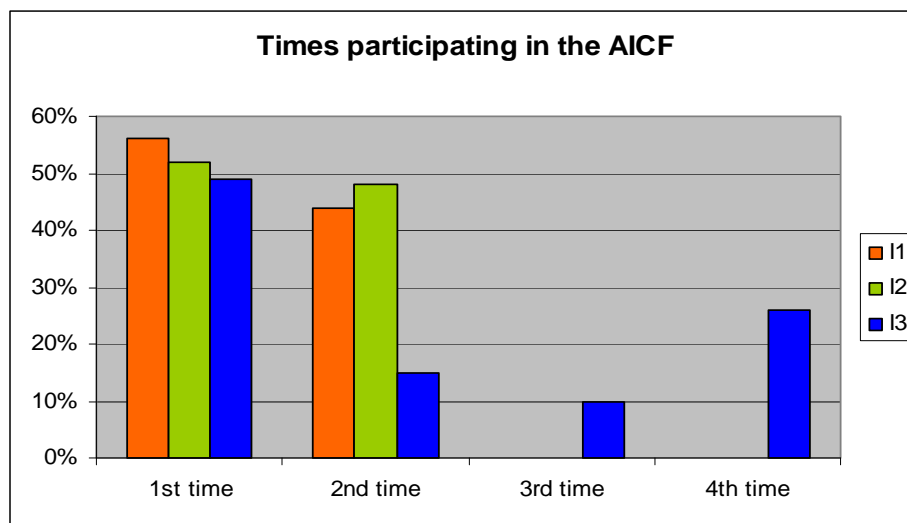
## 5.2 Section A: Background information on AICF participants

Absa is a major national organisation in South Africa. It is therefore not surprising that their staff consists of people representing a wide range of age, race, language and post-level groups working in almost every conceivable region in the country. In Section A of the questionnaire, questions were aimed at establishing a profile of AICF participants re age, gender, ethnicity, home language, post level and number of times participating in the choir project. In 2008 (I<sub>3</sub>) the questionnaire was administered only to a sample per choir, whereas entire choirs were involved in I<sub>1</sub> and I<sub>2</sub><sup>19</sup>.

The mean for each group was obtained through the Frequency Procedure. The means of the outcomes to the questions in Section A are reflected in the bar graphs.

- **How many times have you participated in the AICF?**

Figure 1: Number of times respondents have participated in the AICF

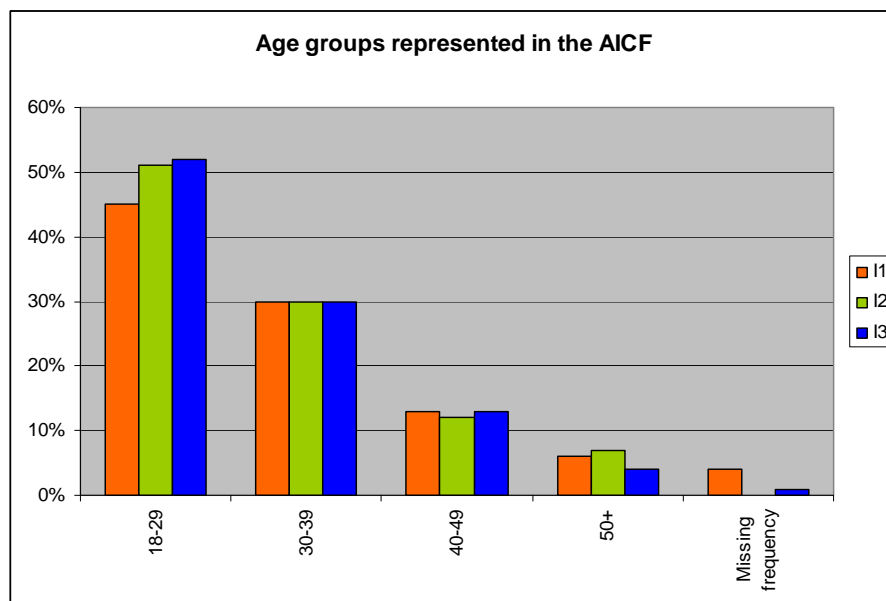


<sup>19</sup> This could affect the profile obtained through the I<sub>3</sub> sample in terms of actual percentages of specific age/race/post level groups in the 2008 Absa choirs.

The indication that no less than half of the AICF participants choose to participate again (with a significant number singing for a third and fourth year) bears evidence to the value of Absa’s choir project to their staff. It also confirms that choir projects, such as the AICF, could be a sustainable enterprise.

**What is your age in completed years?**

Figure 2: AICF age profile



In view of the huge commitment involved in choral singing, the high prevalence of younger people singing in Absa choirs could possibly be understood in terms of a lesser amount of family responsibility – and probably more energy.

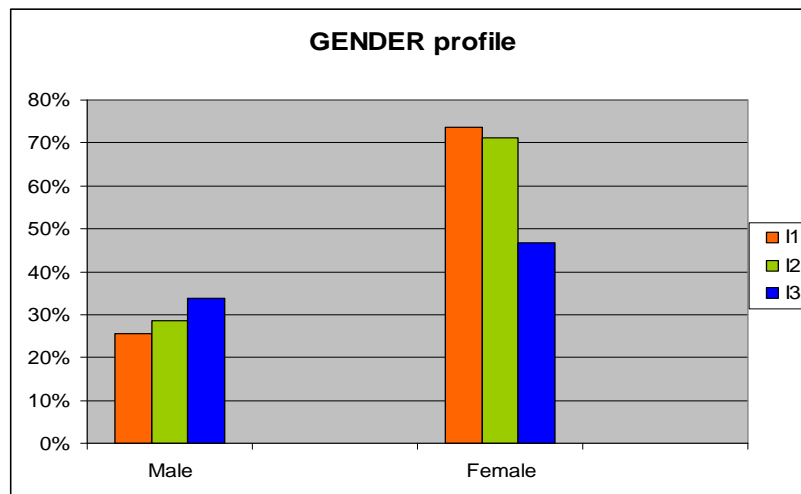
- **What is your gender?**

The following graph (*figure 3*) shows that over four years since the inception of the AICF, there has been an increase in the number of men participating in the choir project, resulting in a more balanced gender representation. Choir trainers have, for reasons that



are understandable, welcomed this tendency: more male voices allow for better balanced choirs; greater choice when it comes to selecting own choice works; and better presentations of the prescribed Absa song where, in the absence of adequate bass voices, SATB sometimes has to be sung as SAT. Further, it also addresses superficial perceptions of music as a largely female enterprise.

Figure 3: AICF gender profile

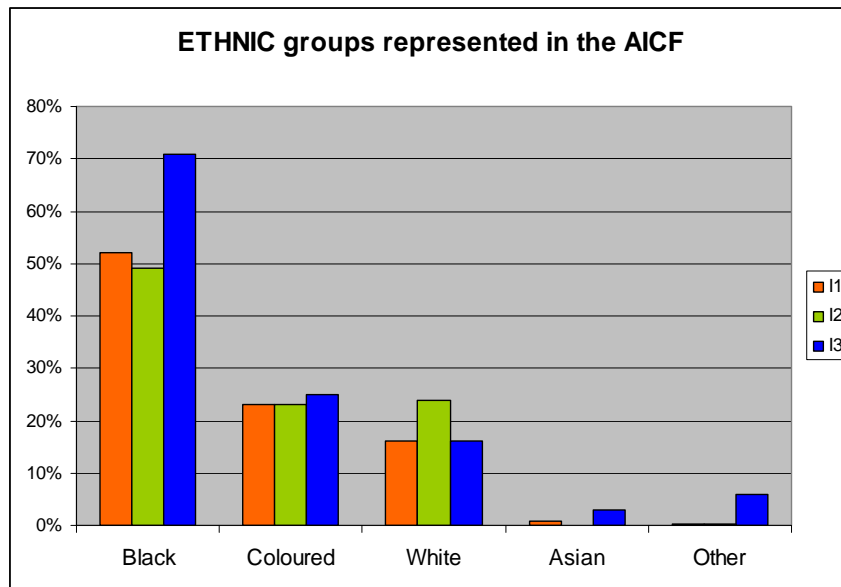


- **To which ethnic group do you belong?**

The graph below (*figure 4*) shows that Absa employees from all ethnic groups are participating in the AICF. This offers each choir member the opportunity of getting to know people of all other ethnic groups in South Africa. The limited Asian employee participation could be related to the status of choral singing in that culture.

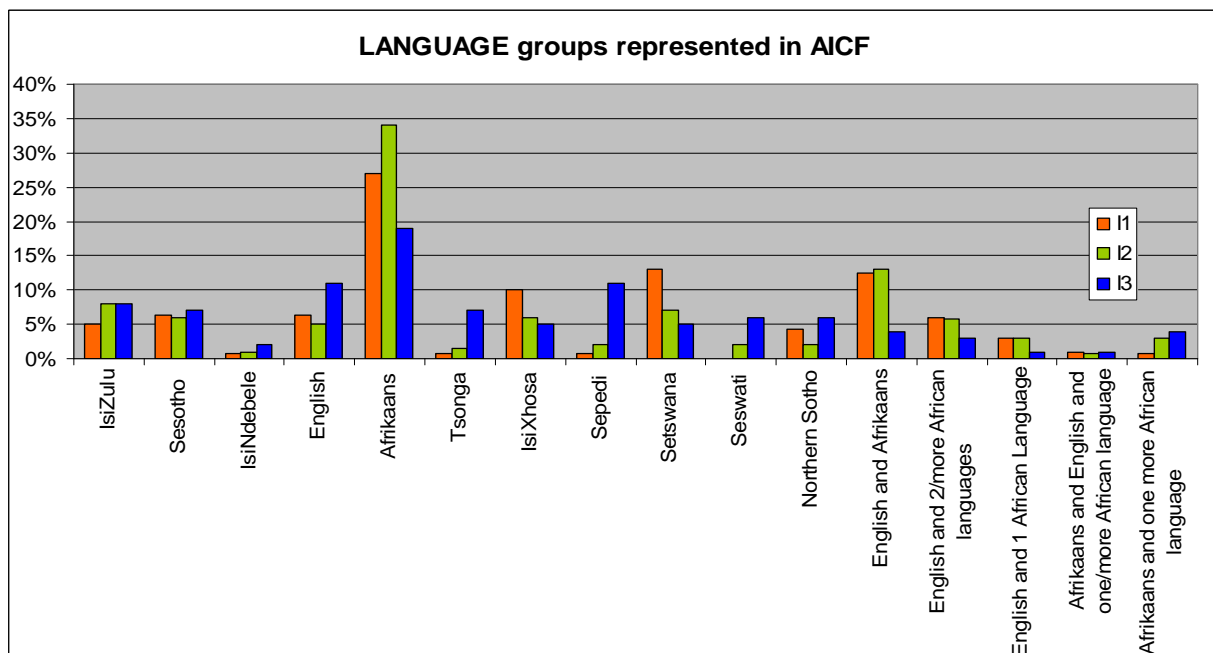
Between I2 and I3 the ethnic profile of the AICF reflects a markable increase in Black participants (49%-71%). Ideally, more White employees should be encouraged to join in future and so allow themselves the opportunity for sharing alternative communicative practices with employees of other cultures.

Figure 4: AICF ethnic profile



- What language or languages do you speak at home?

Figure 5: AICF language profile



The above graph (*figure 5*) clearly reflects the dilemma of especially Afrikaans and English speakers to access the lifeworlds of others of differing language groups due to an inability to speak their languages<sup>20</sup>. Booysen (2007) notes: “Us Whites know too little about Black culture. Black people know much more about us and our culture than what we know, therefore it is our responsibility to learn”.

The wealth of cultural diversity presented in the Absa choirs is evident. This opens abundant possibilities for learning music of other cultures and sharing intercultural choral experiences. It further offers opportunities of singing songs in other South African languages, with mother tongue speakers - fellow choir members - who are available to explain the meaning of the words, give guidance on authentic pronunciation and elucidate the cultural significance and use of the song in its culture. Singing songs in an unknown language is also a good way to overcome one’s fear of the unknown and embark on a journey of learning that language. In the four years of involvement in the AICF, several white Afrikaans speakers have mentioned to the writer that, after experiencing the songs of black South African cultures, they “now want to learn to speak” that language.

Of late in South Africa, a significant number of Black parents choose to send their children to English medium public or, if they can afford to do so, private schools. This could account for the notable percentage of respondents indicating that they speak English and one or more African languages at home.

- **What post level in Absa are you employed at?**

The Absa choirs allow employees over all levels of employment to associate together in a choir with a common goal. There is no differentiation based on status in a choir. In the AICF the conductor is often a choir member who is employed at level B, leading the choir which includes Junior and Middle Management staff.

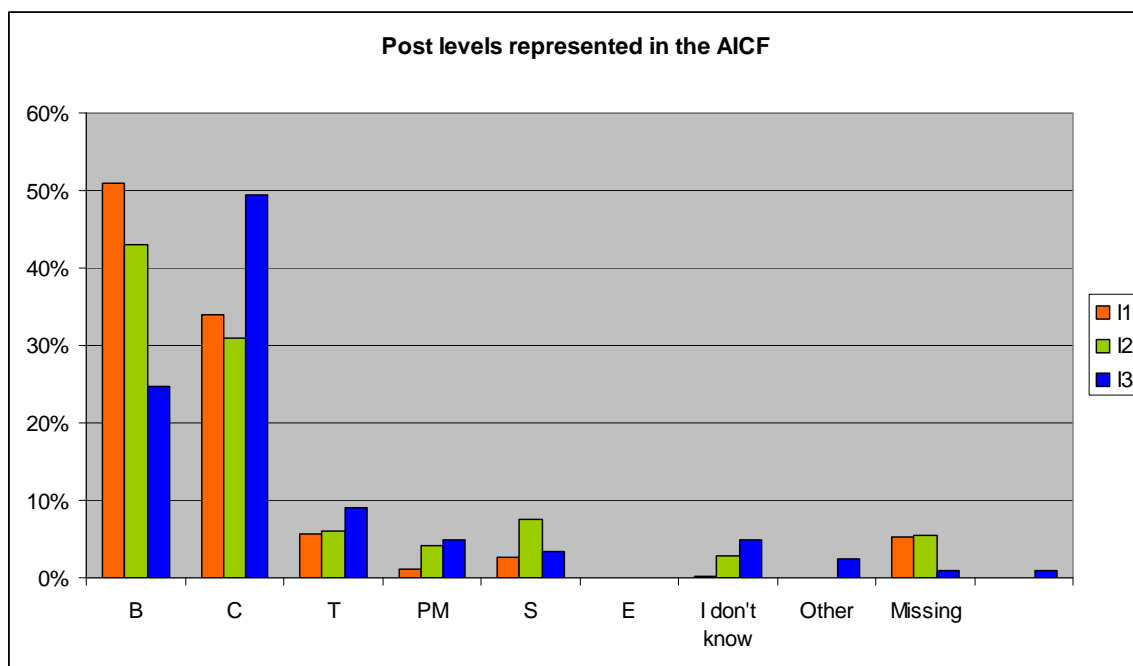
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<sup>20</sup> The question inquired about languages spoken at home – locally it is to be expected that participants can speak other languages. However, in South Africa only a very small percentage of White people can speak Black African languages.

Figure 6a: Post levels in Absa Bank

Description of Absa Post-levels	
<b>B</b>	Entry-level
<b>C</b>	Next level
<b>T</b>	Junior Management
<b>PM</b>	Middle Management
<b>E</b>	General Manager
<b>F</b>	Managing Executive
<b>G</b>	Director

Figure 6b: Post level profile of AICF participants



The above indicates that between 2006 and 2008 there has been an increase in representatives of the higher post levels C, T and PM participating in the AICF.

### 5.3 Section B: Factors

This section of the questionnaire examined the value of the AICF for facilitating human development re the following six factors identified in collaboration with AICF management and Human Resources department:

- **Fun (FUN)** - Did employees perceive participating in this initiative as an enjoyable experience?
- **Proudly Absa (PABSA)** - Has this project instilled an increased sense of corporate pride?
- **Cultural Diversity (CDIV)** - Through participating in this project, did participants perceive they had benefited from this teambuilding and transformation initiative?
- **Teambuilding (TBUILD)** - Through participating in this project, did participants perceive they had benefited from this teambuilding and transformation initiative?
- **Improved Cross-departmental collaboration (CDEPT)** - This factor relates to the sub-question on teambuilding and transformation.
- **Absa does indeed view its staff as “its most important asset” (MIMPAS)** - Does this project instil in employees a sense of being valued as important individuals?

Respondents indicated their views on forty-five “questions” - posed as statements - relating to the six factors. These Likert scale options were provided in order to simplify the process:

- 1 = *I most strongly disagree*
- 2 = *I strongly disagree*
- 3 = *I slightly disagree*
- 4 = *I slightly agree*
- 5 = *I strongly agree*
- 6 = *I most strongly agree.*

Arranged per the groups identified in Section A, the graphs below reflect the means obtained through the T Test for Section B. The Standard Error<sup>21</sup> (estimated deviation or error in the method) is indicated in the table on the right. The T Test results for Section B of the questionnaire are presented on the graphs below. For each factor, seven graphs illustrate the mean for the factor, as allocated per the seven groups in Section A.

**Please note:**

1. Concluding each section/factor, a graph illustrating the mean (*m*) of the summative ratings for that factor is presented. Additionally, the actual mean and the Standard Error of the mean (SEM) - estimated deviation or error in the method - is indicated in a supplementary table with each ‘summative graph’; and
2. Due to the large number of languages and combinations of languages presented in the AICF, these languages are indicated as numbers in the graphs illustrating each of the six factors as per *Language*. The following tables indicate the languages represented by these numbers:

1. IsiZulu	2. Sesotho	3. IsiNdebele	4. English	5. Afrikaans	6. Tsonga	7. IsiXhosa
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8. Sepedi	9. Setswana	10. Seswati	11. Northern Sotho	12. English and Afrikaans
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13. English and two or more African languages	14. English and One African Language	15. Afrikaans, English and one or more African language	16. Afrikaans and one or more African languages
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<sup>21</sup> The Standard Error of a statistic is the standard deviation of the sample distribution of that statistic. Standard errors are important because they reflect how much sampling fluctuation a statistic will show (Hyperstat Contents 2008).



**Abbreviations used in this section:**

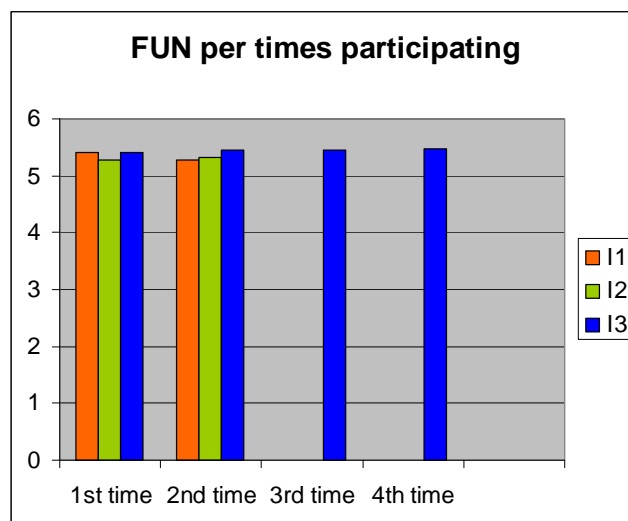
- **EC:** Eastern Cape
- **FS:** Free State
- **GP:** Gauteng
- **GPN:** Gauteng North:
- **KZN:** KwaZulu-Natal
- **LP:** Limpopo
- ***m*:** Mean
- **Mpu:** Mpumalanga
- **NC:** Northern Cape
- **N.p.i:** Did not participate in this intervention
- **NW:** North West
- **P:** Province
- **SEM:** Standard Error of the Mean
- **WC:** Western Cape.

The following pages review the outcomes of the investigation of the AICF pertaining to the six factors examined - 1. *fun* (FUN); 2. *proudly Absa* (PABSA); 3. *cultural diversity* (CDIV); 4. *teambuilding* (TBUILD); 5. *cross-departmental collaboration* (CDEPT); and 6. *Absa does indeed view its staff as its “most valuable asset”* (MIMPAS).

### 5.3.1 Factor 1 – Fun (FUN)

Questions related to *Fun* explored whether singing in an Absa choir had a positive influence on participants’ mood, and if they felt happier and less stressed after choir practices. The following graphs (*figure 7-14b*) reflect the respondents’ evaluation of choral singing in regards to FUN by group (Section A).

*Figure 7:* FUN per number of times participating in the AICF



Respondents who participate year after year without fail in the AICF appear to have experienced a consistent increased sense of fun in choral singing.

As seen in *figure 8* below, Absa employees from all regions enjoyed singing in Absa choirs.



Figure 8: FUN per Absa region in South Africa

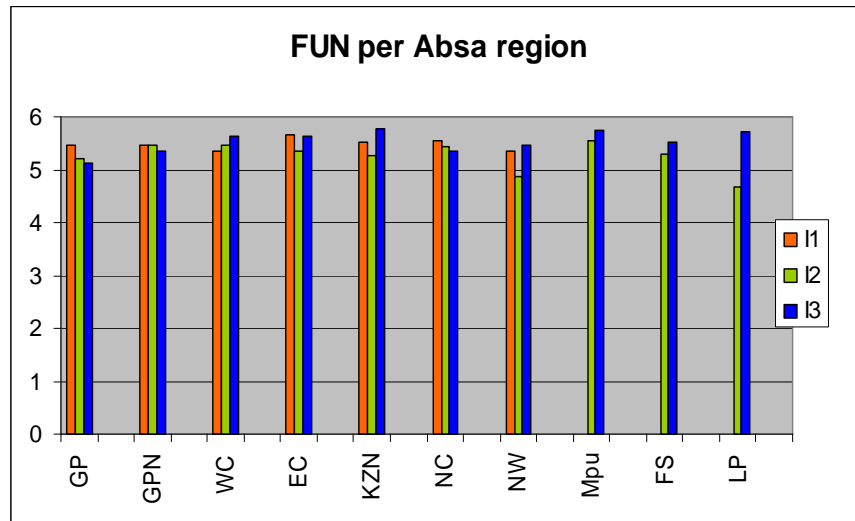
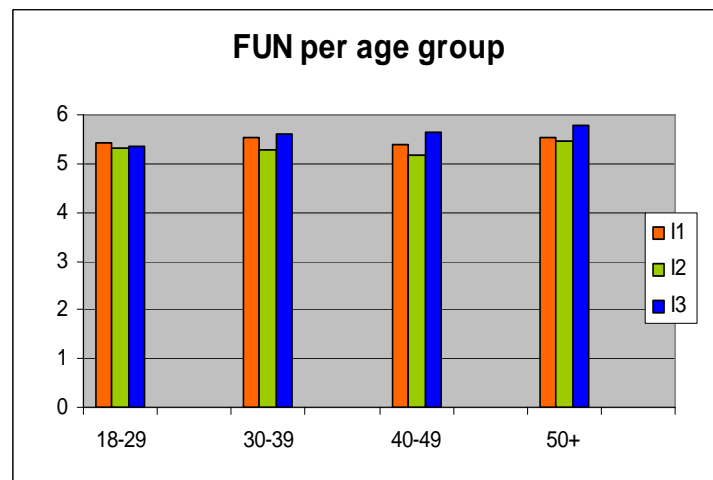
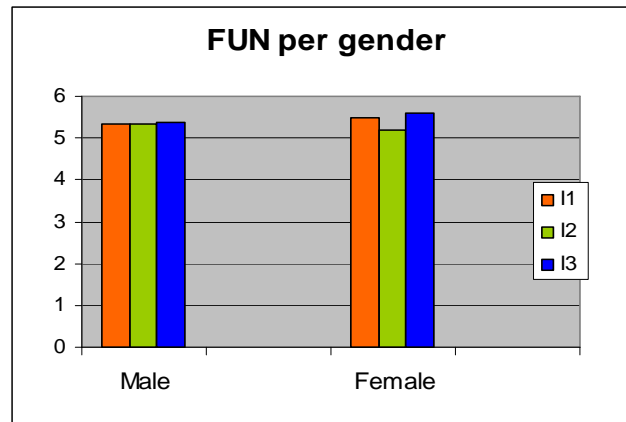


Figure 9: FUN per AICF age profile



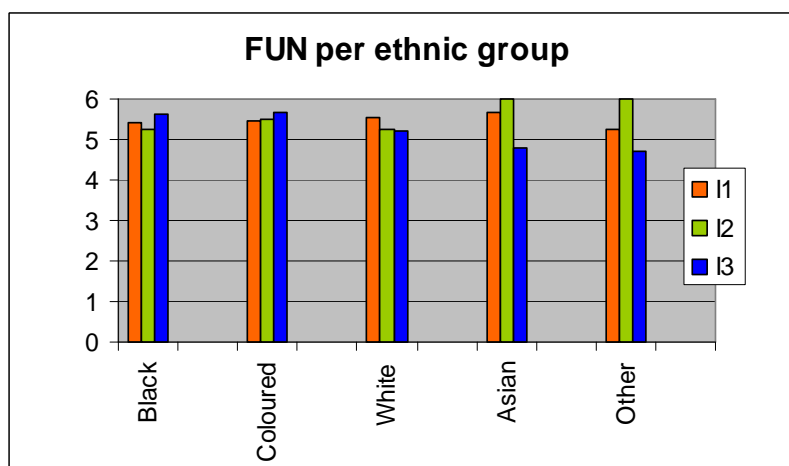
Although employees across all ages indicated that they have enjoyed their choir experience, respondents in the 50+ age category seem to have the most fun singing in choirs. Male choristers seem to have a more consistent emotional response to their choral experience.

Figure 10: FUN per AICF gender profile



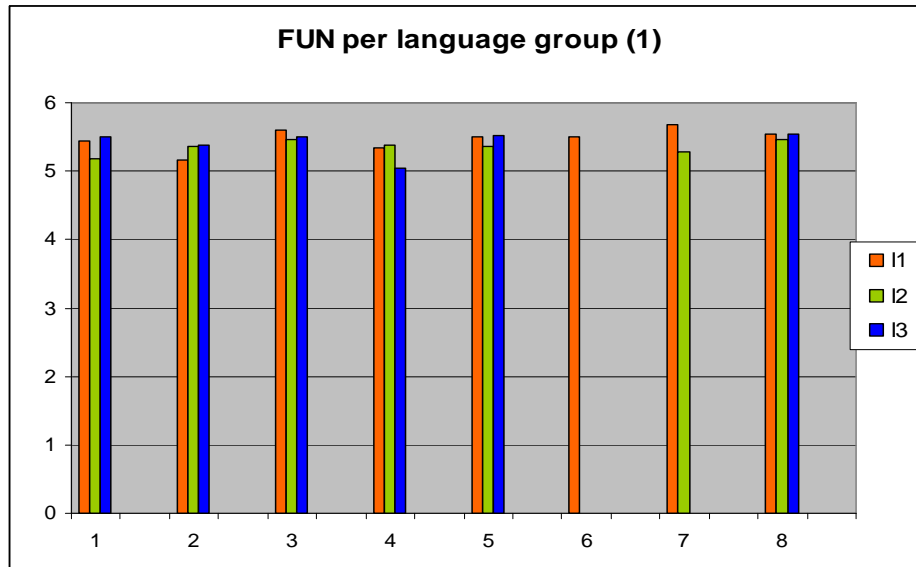
Intervention 2 occurred the day before the final Absa choir competition in 2006. It could be that the stress of the forthcoming competition was more profoundly felt by the female respondents. As suggested by one of the respondents, “us ladies are always more stressed than the men”.

Figure 11: FUN per AICF ethnic profile



It is interesting to note that, while the Asian group had the most fun in I2, they had the least fun in I3. All language groups have, however, indicated that choral singing was fun.

Figure 12a: FUN per language groups 1-8



As seen in *figure 12b* below, those who speak English and one African language -*group 14* - allocated the maximum (six out of six) for FUN in I3.

Figure 12b: FUN per language groups 9-16

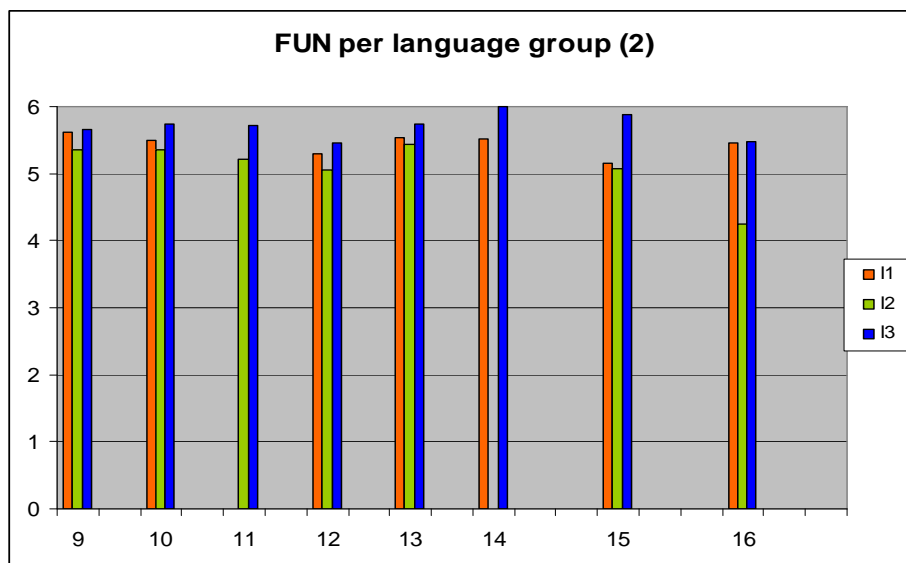
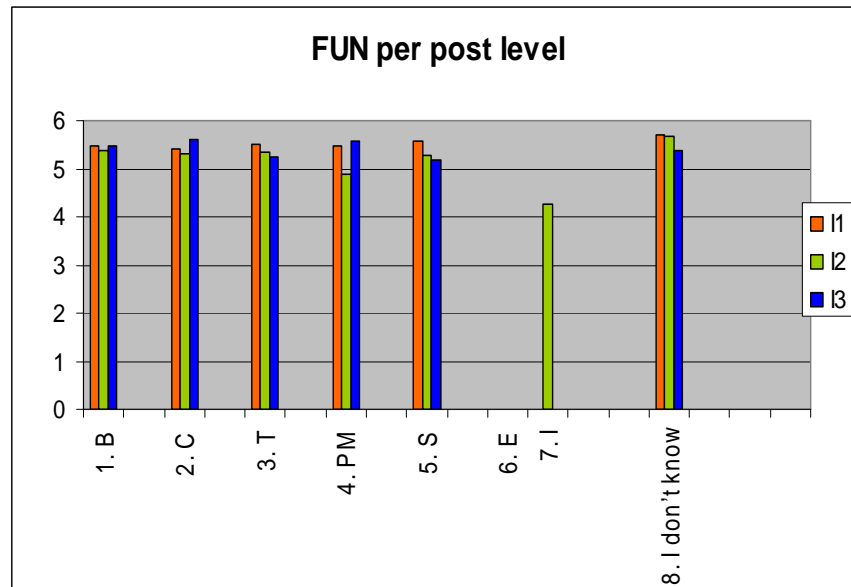


Figure 13: FUN per post level employed at in Absa Bank



AICF participants across all other post-levels appear to have experienced singing in the Absa choirs as a fun activity. The lowest score was assigned by respondents appointed on post-level I during I2 – this was the only intervention where respondents appointed at this post-level participated in the AICF, unless they chose not to participate in this survey. No post-level E employee participated in the 2006 or 2008 AICF.

The summative ratings for FUN are presented on the following graph (*figure 14a*). It is evident that AICF participants perceived participating in the choir project as an enjoyable experience.

Figure 14a: Summative ratings for FUN: I1-I3

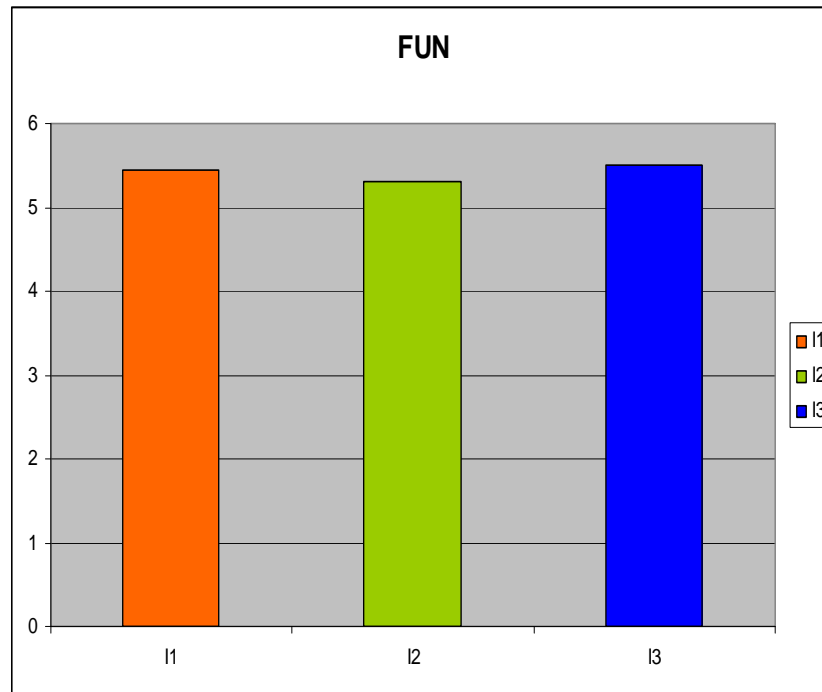


Figure 14b: Table of mean and Standard Error of FUN summative ratings

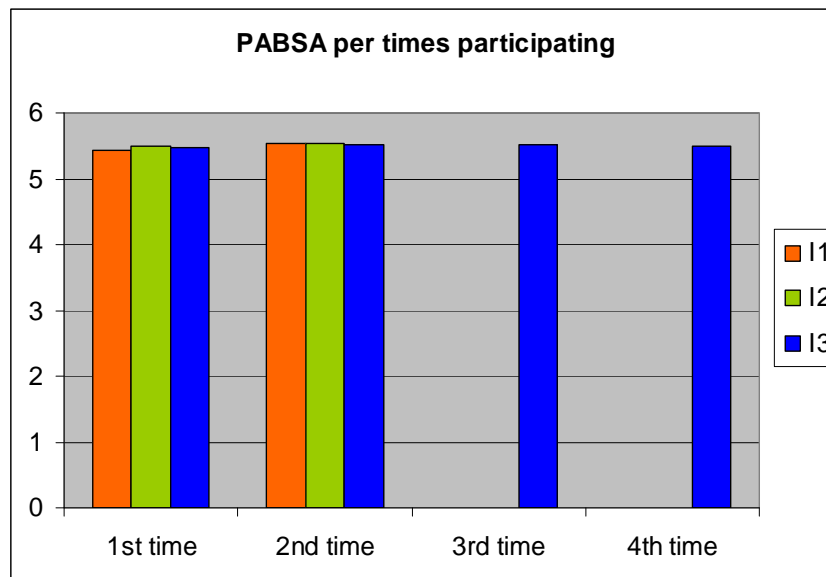
	I1	I2	I3
<i>m:</i>	5.45	5.3	5.5
SEM:	0.033	0.048	0.055

The overall scores for fun clearly indicate that AICF participants had a great deal of fun in the choir process. The lowest score (5.3 out of 6) was designated in I2, while the highest was in I3. This indicates that the AICF is not fading as a source of fun and stress relief – on the contrary, this factor continues to be very highly rated. The following graphs reflect the respondents’ evaluation of choral singing in regards to FUN by group (Section A).

### 5.3.2 Factor 2 - Proudly Absa (PABSA)

The questions relating to this factor examined if participation in the AICF produced an increased sense of pride in Absa.

*Figure 15:* PABSA per number of times participating in the AICF



First to fourth time participants clearly conveyed that the AICF brought about an increased sense of pride in Absa. The raise in Absa pride between interventions one and two is worthy of note as I1 and I2 occurred within two months of each other. The greater commitment that is required of each choir member, as well as the manner in which the AICF process is managed in its final phase (preparing for, and including the final event), seem to have created a genuine source of pride in Absa.

*Figure 16* shows that, in all ten of the Absa provinces throughout the country, I1, I2 and I3 respondents clearly communicated that the AICF gave them reason to experience an increased sense of esteem for Absa:

Figure 16: PABSA per Absa region in South Africa

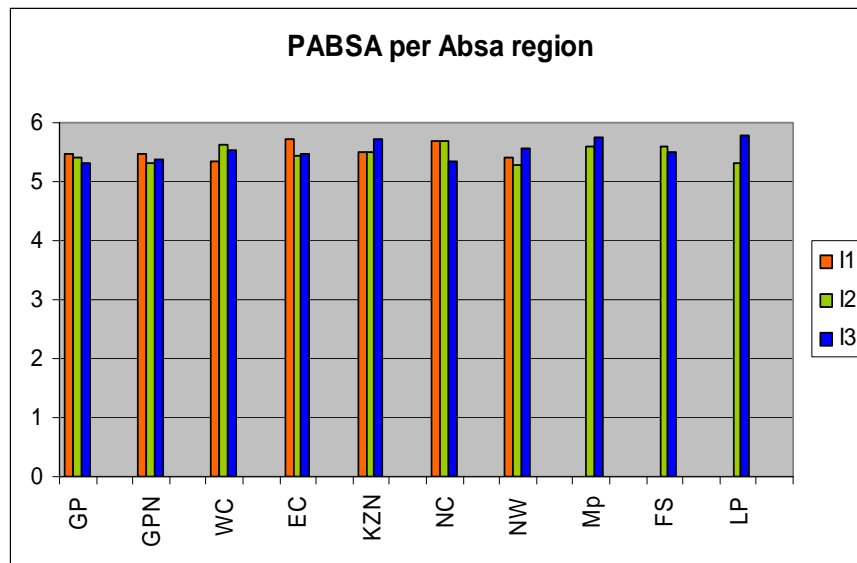
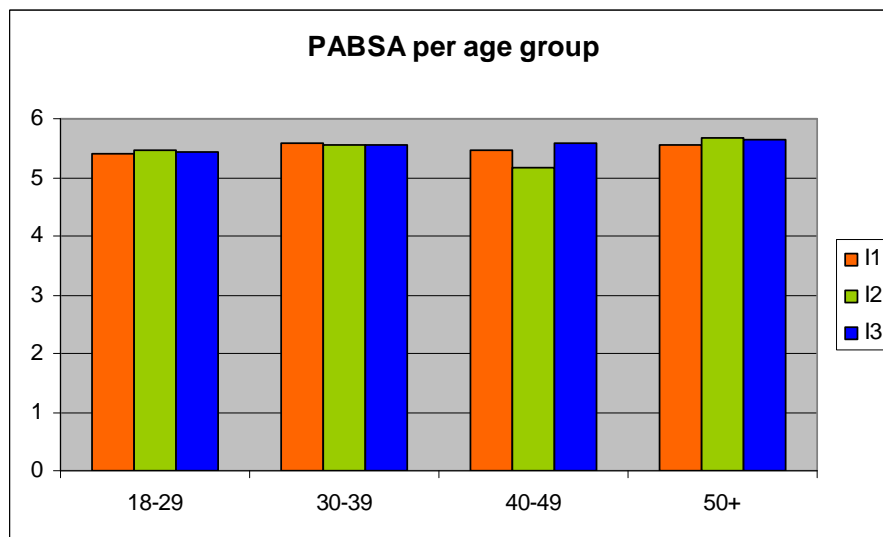


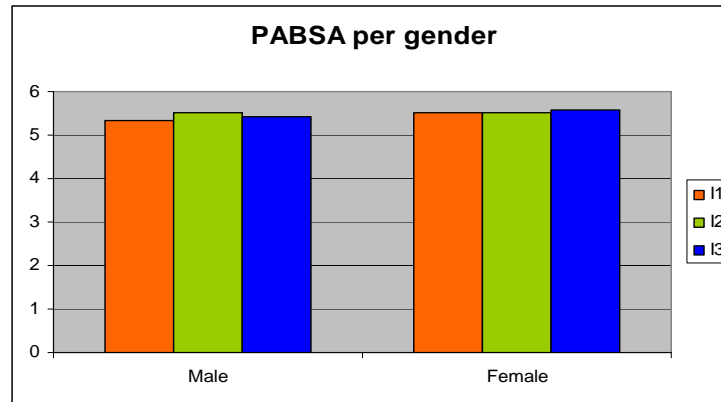
Figure 17: PABSA per AICF age profile



The above graph (*figure 17*) reflects optimistic views held by respondents re increased pride in Absa through the AICF. The choir project seems to generate a sense of pride in Absa for participants in the 50+ age group in particular. It is interesting that both the

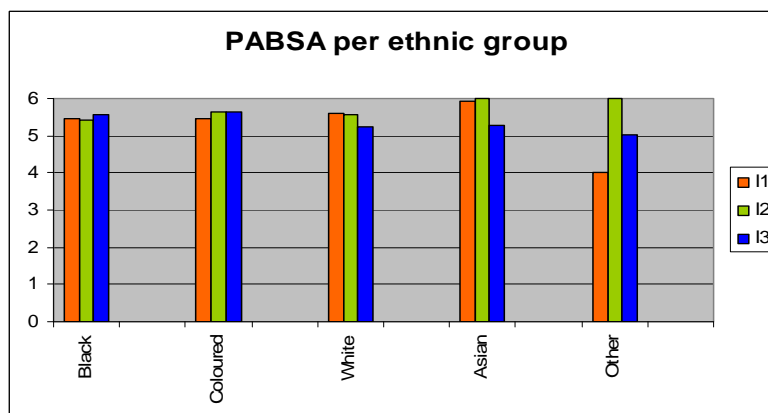
lower (40-49 age group:  $m=5.16$ ) and higher (50+ age group:  $m=5.66$ ) ratings for this factor were given in I2. Since this intervention took place immediately before the 2006 Finals, the question arises if people in the 40+ age group could perhaps be particularly prone to competition-related stress while the opposite is true of the 50+ age group.

Figure 18: PABSA per AICF gender profile



The data relating PABSA to gender exhibits a consistent ‘female perception’ of the AICF as a source of pride in Absa. This could be because a notable percentage of the men were participating for the first time. The graph below illustrates that, notwithstanding the low precedence of choral singing the Asian community, the AICF specifically afforded Asian participants an augmented esteem of Absa.

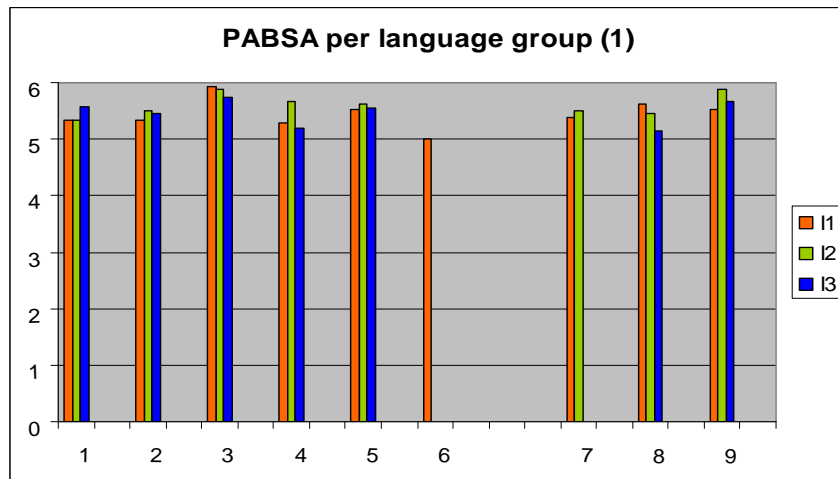
Figure 19: PABSA per AICF ethnic profile





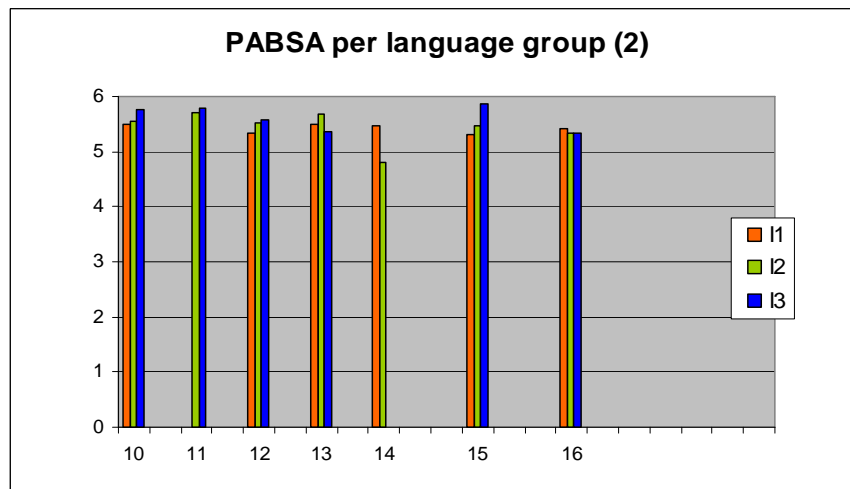
Absa employees of all ethnic groupings developed an increased sense of pride in the company through participation in the AICF. The only rating lower than 5 out of 6 was allocated in the first intervention by the “other” ethnic group of participants.

Figure 20a: PABSA per language groups 1-9



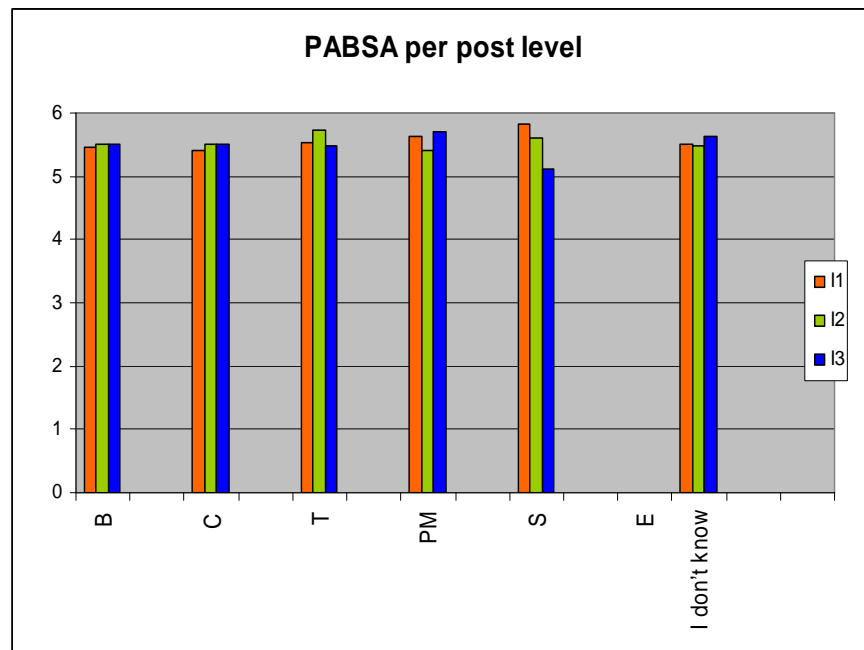
Participating in choral singing (as a communicative practice) has enhanced all AICF participants’ - of language groups 1-16 - esteem for their organisation.

Figure 20b: PABSA per language groups 10-16



The following graph (*figure 21*) points out that, in I1, I2 and I3, the AICF succeeded in fostering a greater sense of pride in Absa for employees across all post levels in the bank who participated in the choir project.

*Figure 21:* PABSA per post level employed at in Absa Bank



As illustrated in the following graph (*figure 22a*), the summative ratings for PABSA clearly shows that the AICF succeeds in fostering pride in Absa for participants in the choir project.

Figure 22a: Summative ratings for PABSA: I1-I3

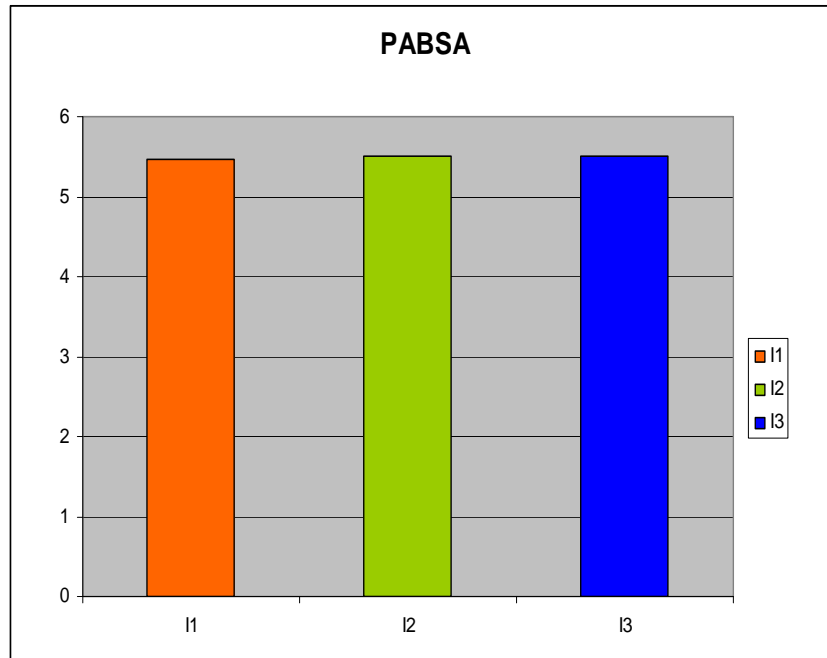


Figure 22b: Table of mean and Standard Error of PABSA summative ratings

	<b>I1</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>I3</b>
<i>m:</i>	5.47	5.51	5.5
SEM:	0.033	0.048	0.055

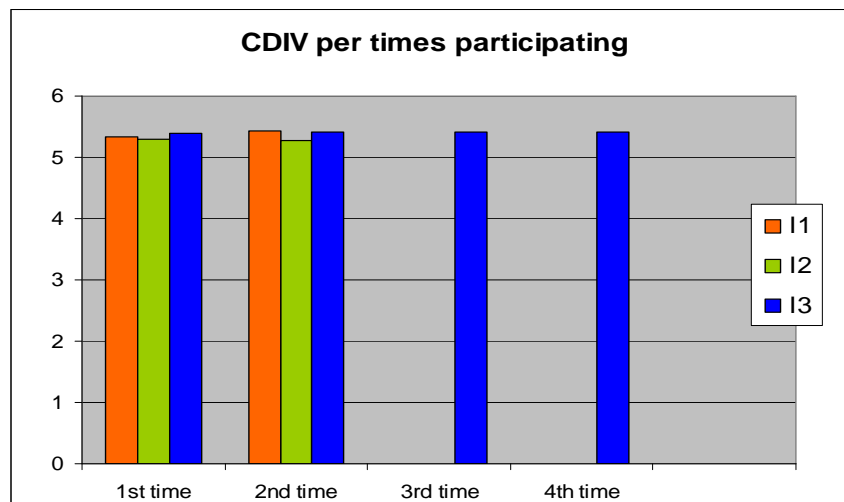
An increasingly positive perception of the AICF as a source of Absa pride has been established since I1. The reality is that even in I1 the score for this factor ( $m= 5.47$ ) was undeniably high. It is clear that a choir project such as the AICF advances employee esteem for and pride in their company.

### 5.3.3 Factor 3 - Cultural Diversity (CDIV)

In South Africa the term *transformation* generally has racial implications. In Chapter 2 it was established that South Africans from differing cultural groupings need to engage in the lifeworlds of others and experience alternative communicative practices to negate superficial prejudgments of each other if true transformation is to occur in this country. Choral singing was suggested as such a communicative practice. The following graphs illustrate the opinions of AICF participants re improving understanding of differing cultures and overcoming obstacles posed by cultural diversity through choir participation.

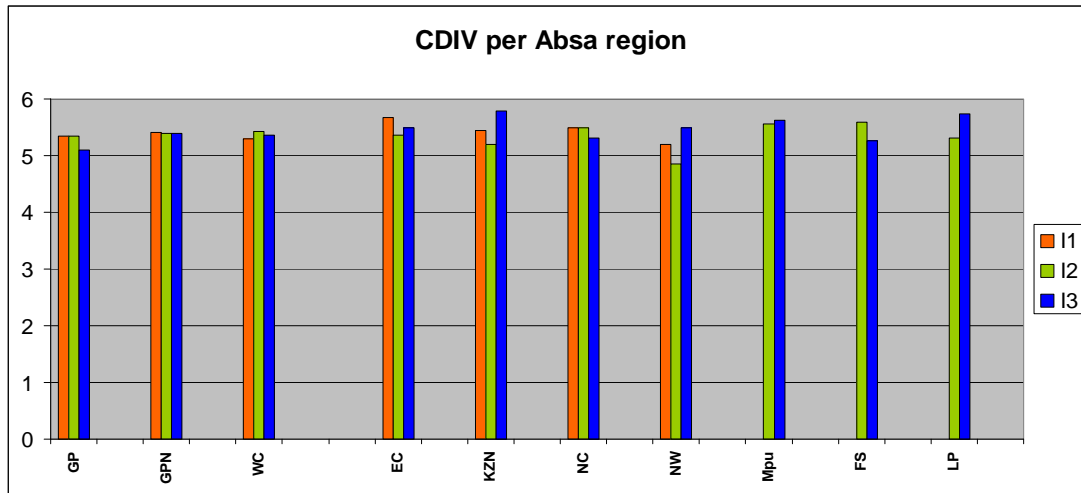
The first graph demonstrates the means of the ratings allotted to this factor by first, second, third and fourth time participants in the Absa choir project.

Figure 23: CDIV per number of times participating in the AICF



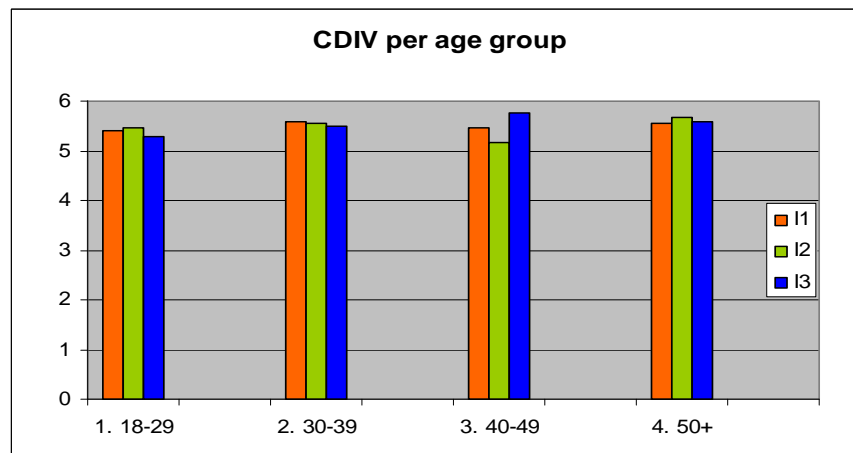
Respondents were perceived to have gained in regards to overcoming cultural hurdles through participating in the AICF. The lowest rating obtained was  $m=5.28$  (I2, respondents participating for the second time).

Figure 24: CDIV per Absa region in South Africa



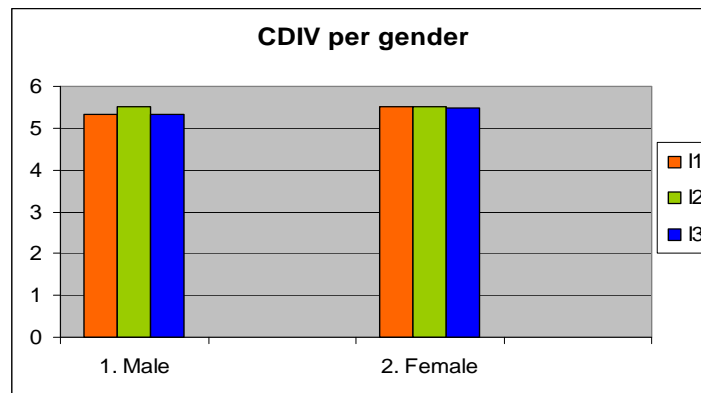
In all ten regions AICF participants seem to appreciate the role choral singing played in aiding them to develop appreciation for and relationships with people from other cultures. The overall highest score was allocated by the 2008 winners of the national competition of the AICF: KZN (I3:  $m=5.79$ ).

Figure 25: CDIV per AICF age profile



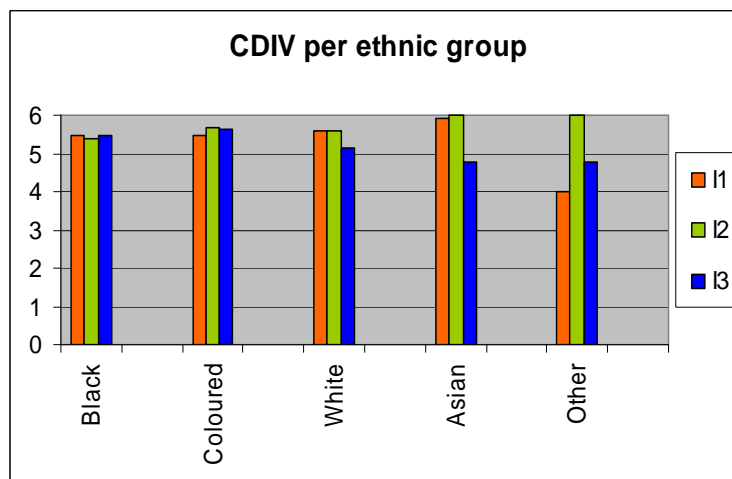
The ratings allocated by the age group 40-49 fluctuate notably. The lowest of all the ratings also occurs in this age category (I2). However, this lowest score is still indicating that respondents have indeed experienced improved relationships across cultural diversity:  $m=5.16$ .

Figure 26: CDIV per AICF gender profile



In their view of CDIV, male respondents seem more erratic than their female counterparts. This may indicate that female participants find it easier to form relationships with fellow choir members from differing cultures.

Figure 27: CDIV per AICF ethnic profile



The perceptions of different language groups are particularly significant to this factor, as language is an important element of culture.

Figure 28a: CDIV per language groups 1-9

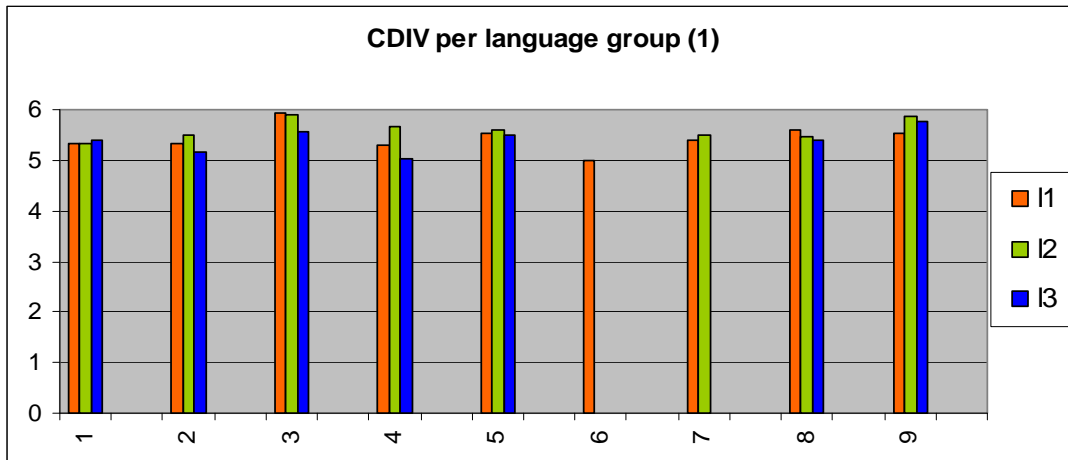
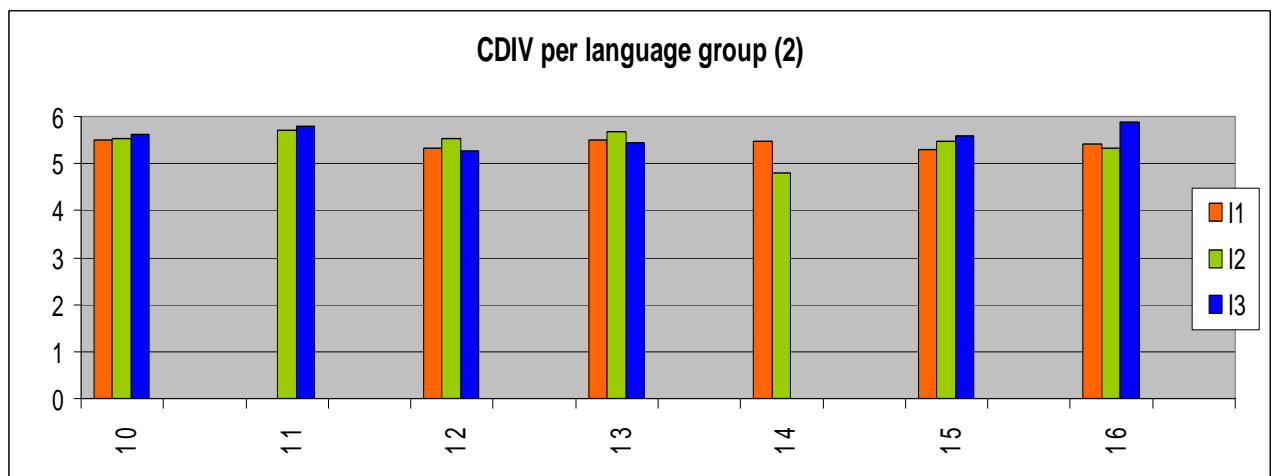


Figure 28b: CDIV per language groups 10-16

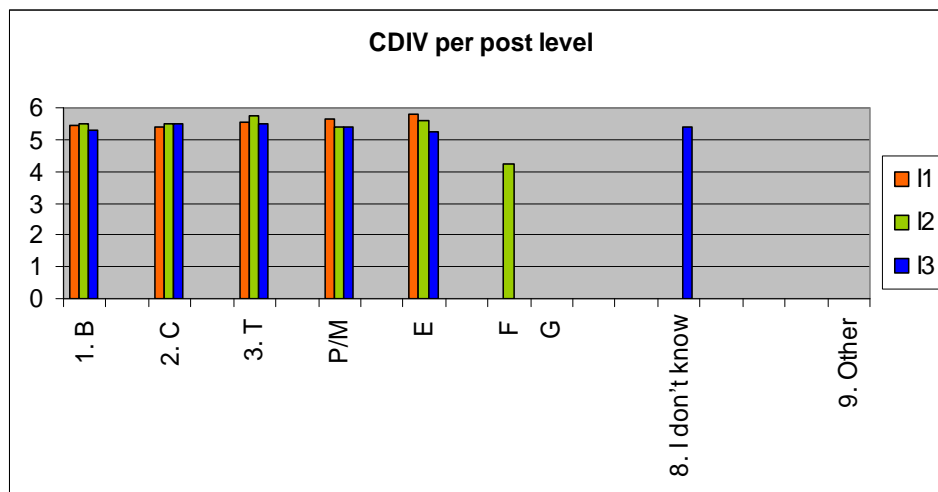


All language groups seem to perceive the AICF as an opportunity to gain better understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, and make contacts and build relationships with fellow Absa choir members from differing cultural orientation. The highest ratings were allotted by *group3*, the Ndebele (I1:  $m=5.93$ ; I2:  $m=5.89$ ) and *group*

9, the Tswana (I2:  $m=5.88$ ), while the lowest ratings came from English speakers/group 4 (I3:  $m=5.03$ ) and those indicating that they speak English and one African language at home/group 13 (I2:  $m=4.81$ ).

When examining the ratings given to improved understanding of and respect for the range of diverse cultural backgrounds represented in the Absa work force as a result of singing together in an Absa choir, post level F respondents seemed to have evaluated this factor with more caution (I2:  $m=4.25$ ) than any other group.

Figure 29: CDIV per post level employed at in Absa Bank



The summative ratings for CDIV are presented in *figure 30a*. This graph demonstrates that respondents experienced their choral participation as an opportunity for improved perceptions and understanding of differing South African cultures as represented in the choir.

Singing together in a choir created opportunities to build relationships with choir members from other racial and cultural backgrounds. It is significant that, through singing together in an Absa choir, participants experienced increased respect for other South African cultures and races, as illustrated in *figure 30a*.



Figure 30a: Summative ratings for CDIV: I1-I3

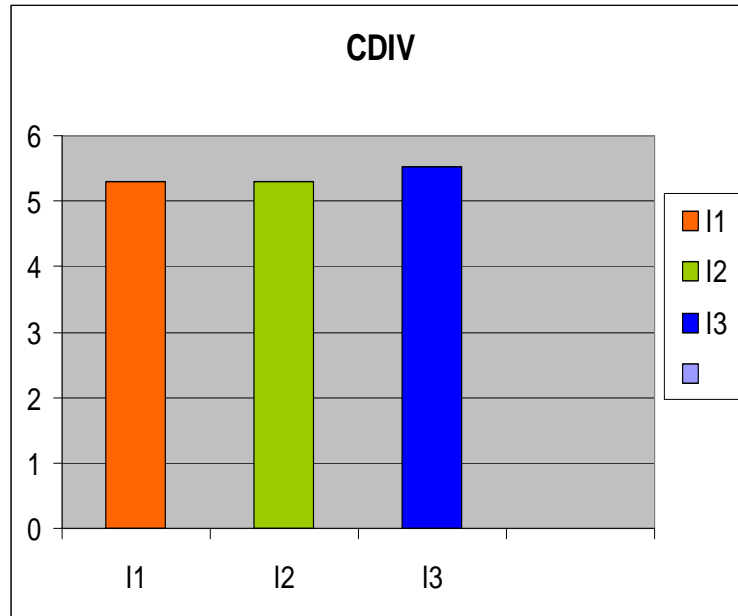


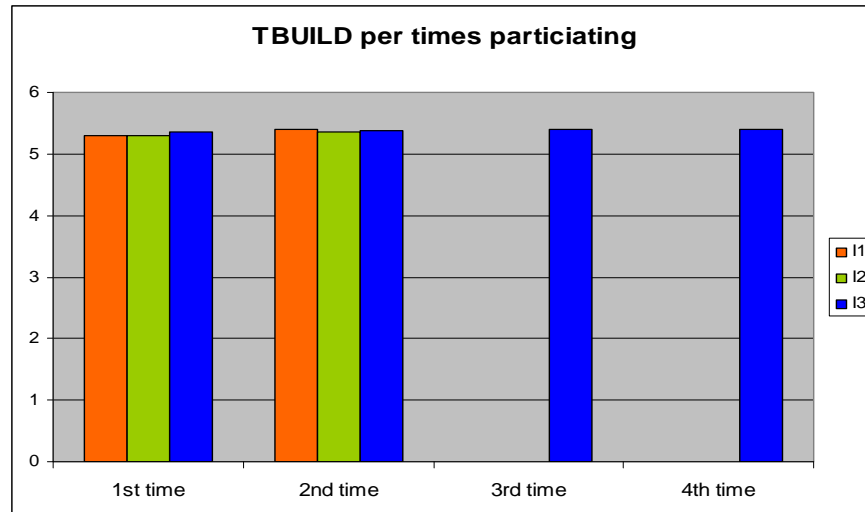
Figure 30b: Table of mean and Standard Error of CDIV summative ratings

	I1	I2	I3
<i>m:</i>	5.3	5.29	5.53
SEM:	0.035	0.047	0.054

The following graphs reflect the efficacy of choir participation as a tool for teambuilding.

### 5.3.4 Factor 4 - Teambuilding (TBUILD)

Figure 31: TBUILD per number of times participating in the AICF



Respondents – 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> time participants - recognise choir participation as a tool for teambuilding. First time participants have indicated the lowest ratings for this factor in all interventions. Respondents’ esteem for the teambuilding qualities inherent in choral singing is not diminished by repeated participation in the AICF.

Figure 32 (below) points out that AICF participants across all Absa regions reported teambuilding as a by-product of building a choir. The lowest scores for this factor were obtained in I2, allocated by North West ( $m=4.82$ ) and Limpopo ( $m=4.71$ ). Considering that these scores equate to 84% (North West) and 78% (Limpopo) respectively, the AICC seems to be of particular value for teambuilding in Absa Bank.

Figure 32: TBUILD per Absa region in South Africa

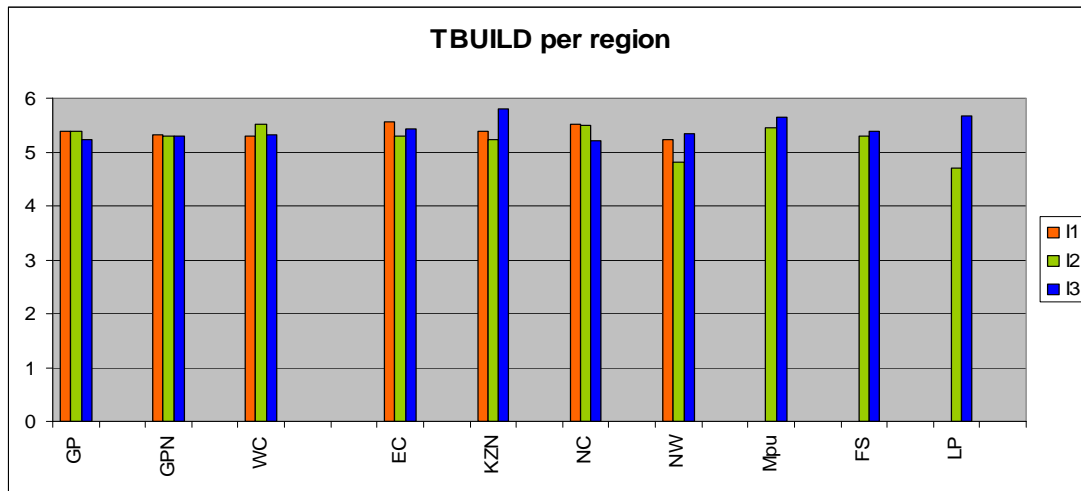
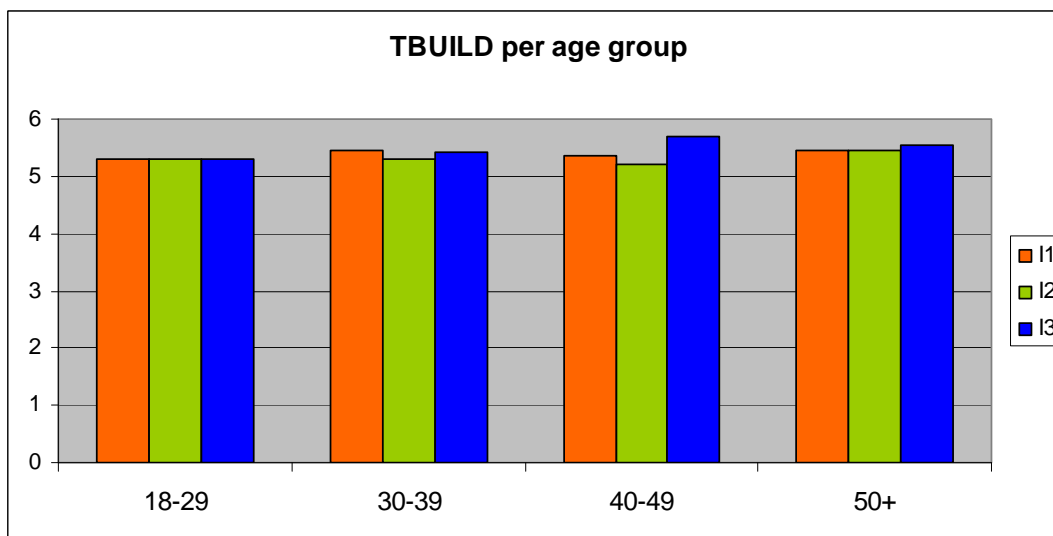


Figure 33: TBUILD per AICF age profile



Respondents in the age group 50+ indicated a consistent esteem of the value of singing in an Absa choir for teambuilding. The lowest score obtained was in I2, age group 40-49:  $m=5.22$ . However, significant fluctuations may appear: the lowest ratings are Male (I1):  $m=5.27$ ; Female (I2):  $m=5.28$ ; and the highest (Female (I3):  $m=5.49$ ) on a scale of six.

Figure 34 illustrates that choir participants from both genders appreciated their choir participation as an opportunity for teambuilding within the greater Absa team.

Figure 34: TBUILD per AICF gender profile

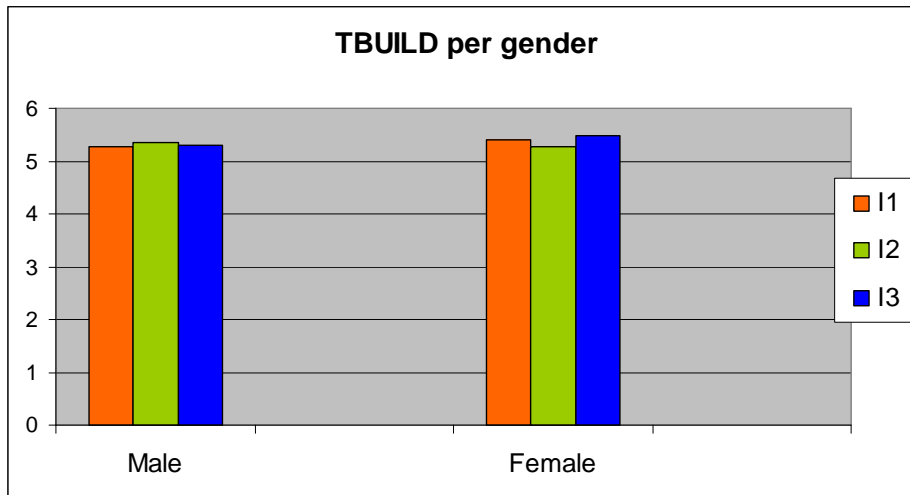
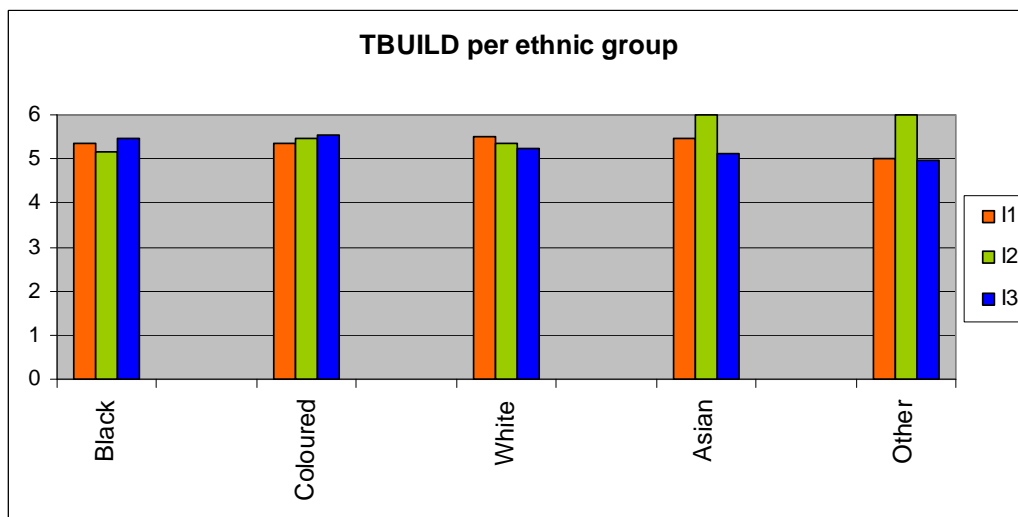
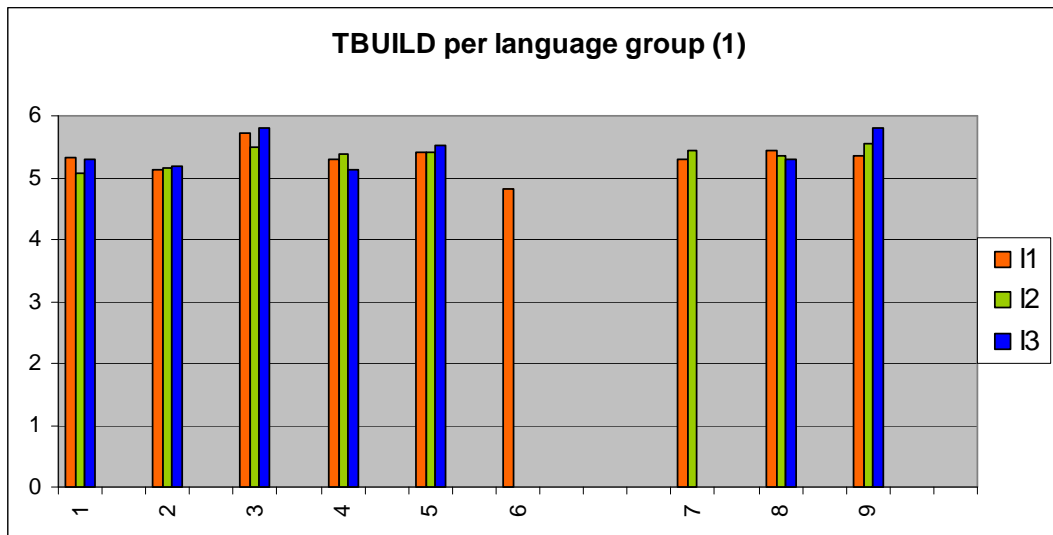


Figure 35: TBUILD per AICF ethnic profile

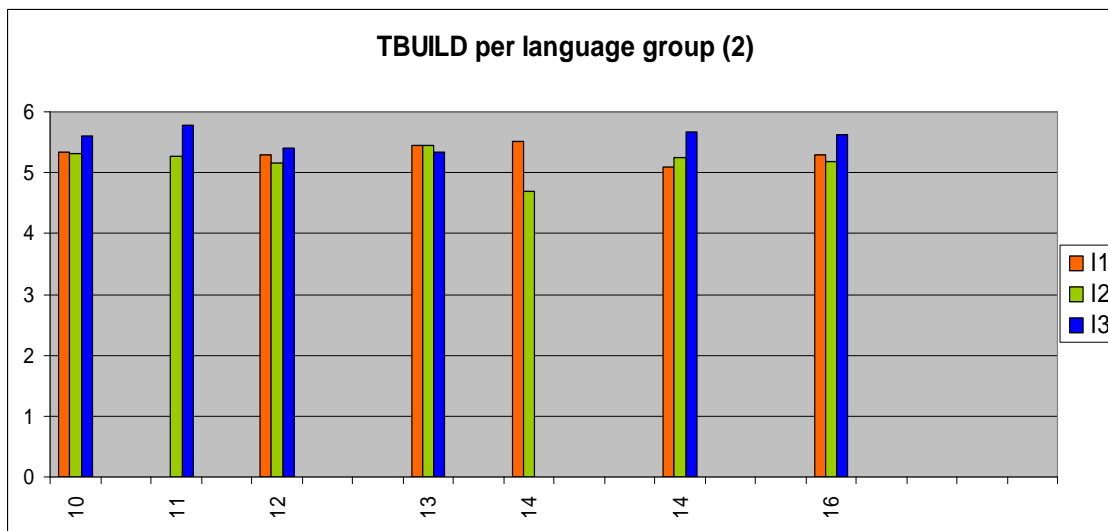


It is significant that all ethnic groups valued their participation in a multicultural choir as a profitable opportunity for teambuilding. In *figure 35* (I2) both Asian and “Other” ethnic groups awarded choir singing as teambuilding exercise a rating of 100% ( $m=6$ ).

*Figure 36a:* TBUILD per language groups 1-9



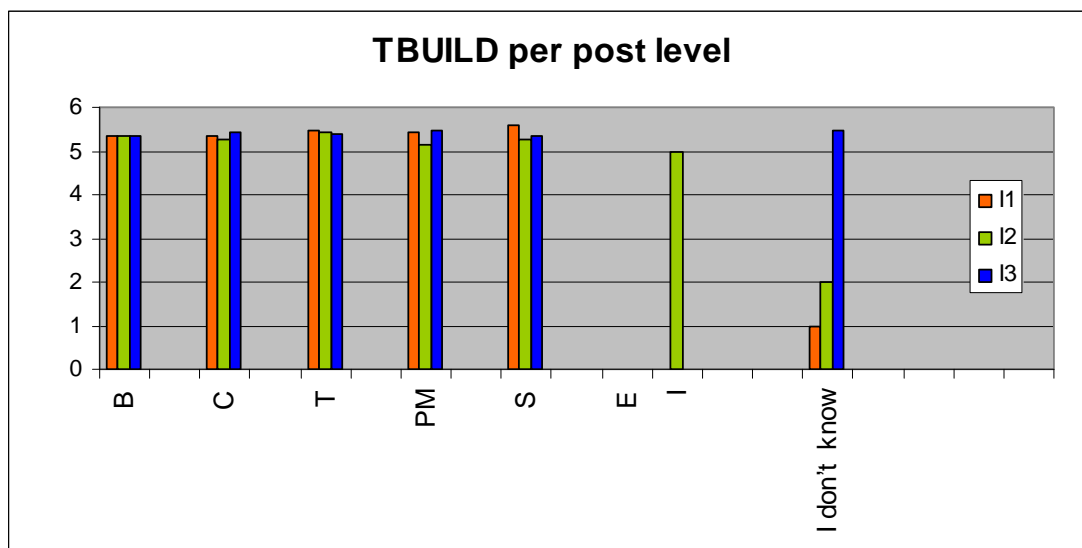
*Figure 36b:* TBUILD per language groups 10-16



The lowest score for TBUILD awarded by a language group was  $m=4.12$ : I2, by *group 13*: English and one or more African language. The highest score,  $m=5.78$ , was found among the Northern Sotho respondents/*group 11* in I3: *figure 36b*.

The lowest scores obtained throughout the survey were allocated for teambuilding in I1 and I2 by those respondents who were unsure of their level of appointment in Absa at the time of these interventions (see *figure 37* below). Not understanding how they fit into the greater Absa team; and/or employment insecurity could have been a determining factor in their negative perception of teambuilding through the AICF.

*Figure 37:* TBUILD per post level employed at in Absa Bank



The collective ratings for teambuilding as a benefit of singing in an Absa choir are illustrated in the final TBUILD graph (*figure 38a*). .

Figure 38a: Summative ratings for TBUILD: I1-I3

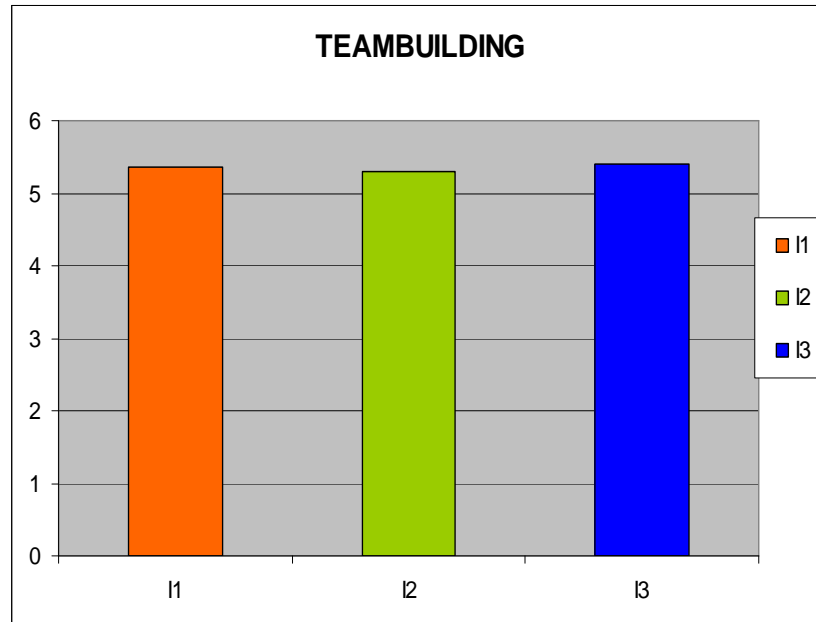


Figure 38b: Table of mean and Standard Error of TBUILD summative ratings

	<b>I1</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>I3</b>
<i>m:</i>	5.36	5.29	5.41
SEM:	0.032	0.043	0.061

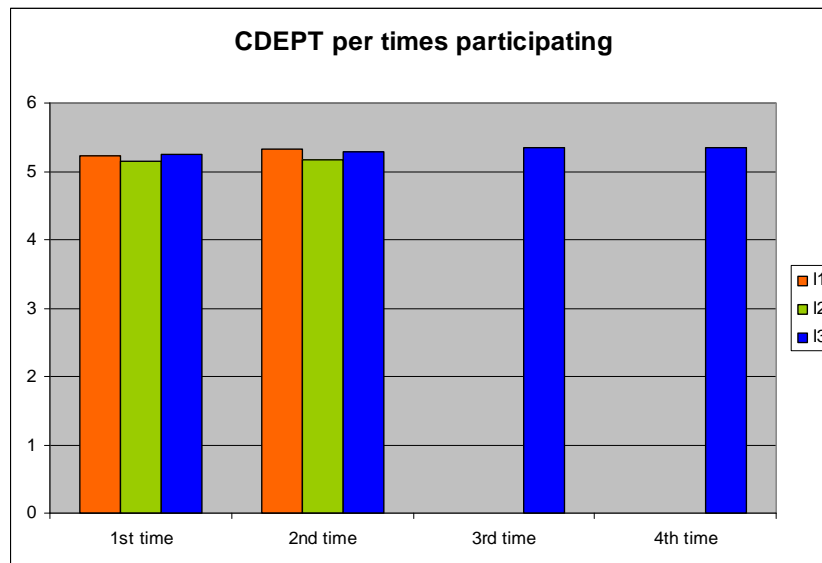
The data clearly indicates that participants experienced their choral activities in the AICF as an avenue for teambuilding. The qualitative data obtained through interviews as well as Section C of the questionnaire substantiates the efficacy of choral singing as tool for teambuilding in a corporate environment such as Absa Bank.

### 5.3.5 Factor 5 - Improving cross-department collaboration (CDEPT)

In a large organisation such as Absa, transactions occur across a significant number of branches, departments, business units and divisions. This factor (CDIV) is based on the hypothesis that when people associate with other employees from different business units and learn more about their work, it produces an improved global understanding of the organisation. This understanding, as well as the networks created – knowing the person on the other side of the line/screen – could facilitate better communication, cooperation and ultimately transactions in the organisation (Absa).

The graph below (*figure 39*) demonstrates the means of the ratings allotted to this factor by first, second, third and fourth time participants in the Absa choir project.

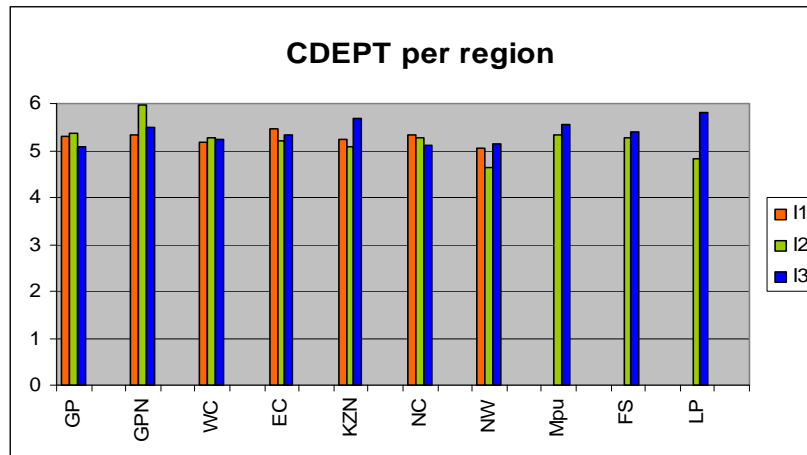
*Figure 39:* CDEPT per times participating in the AICF



First time participants’ perceptions of the AICF as an opportunity to build networks across business divisions were least optimistic at the time of I2 ( $m=5.15$ ). Respondents from all regions seemed to have benefited professionally by building connections through singing in choirs with Absa employees from different business divisions.

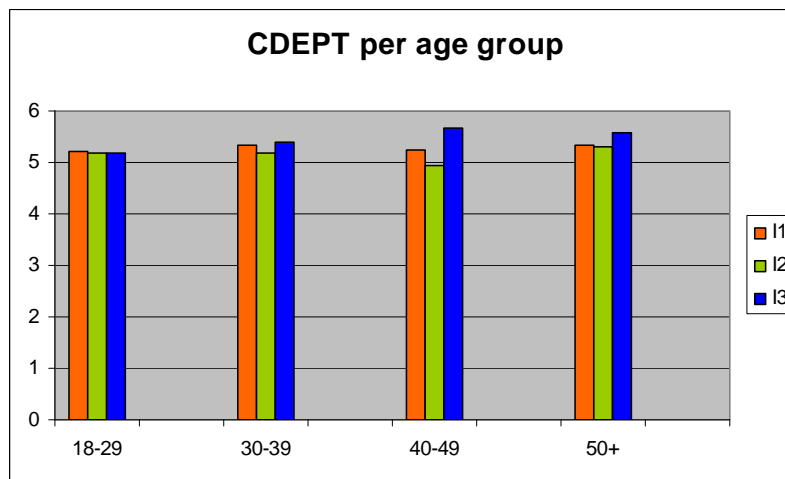


Figure 40: CDEPT per Absa region in South Africa



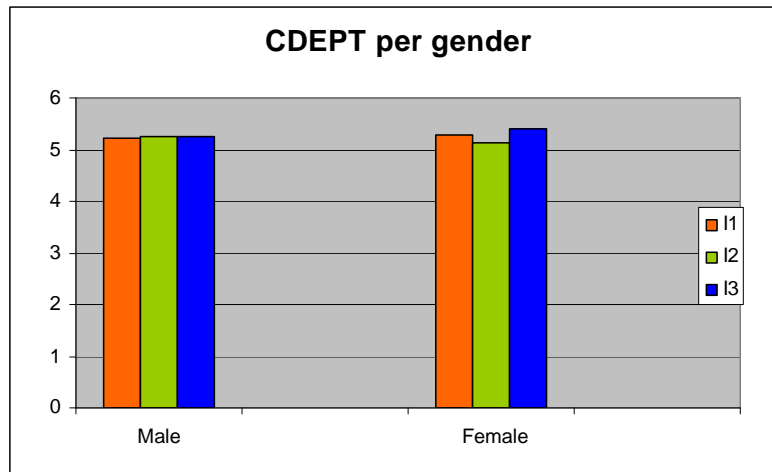
As seen in *figure 40*, Gauteng North participants seemed to have especially appreciated the value of networks built through choir for professional transaction at the time of I2:  $m=5.98$ .

Figure 41: CDEPT per the AICF age profile



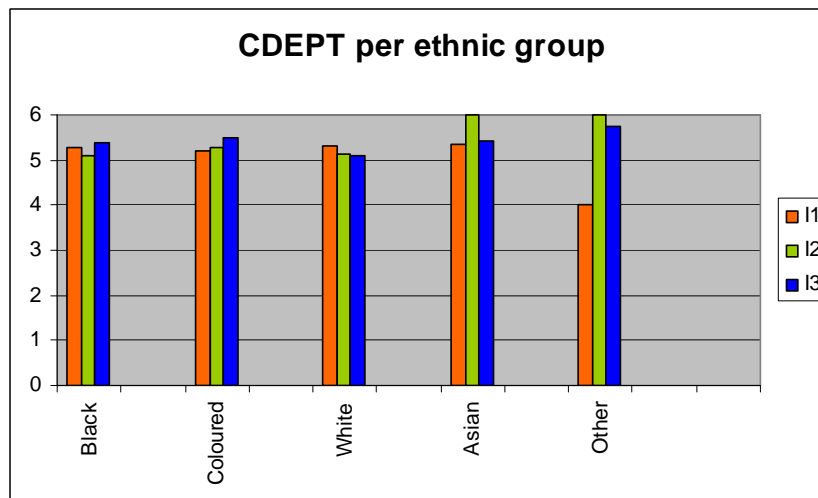
Inconsistency of opinions re the positive impact of singing in a choir with people from different business divisions upon efficiency in the work environment occurs in the age group 40-49 (see *figure 41* above).

Figure 42: CDEPT per the AICF gender profile



Female respondents display a somewhat more erratic view of CDEPT than their male counterparts (*figure 42* above).

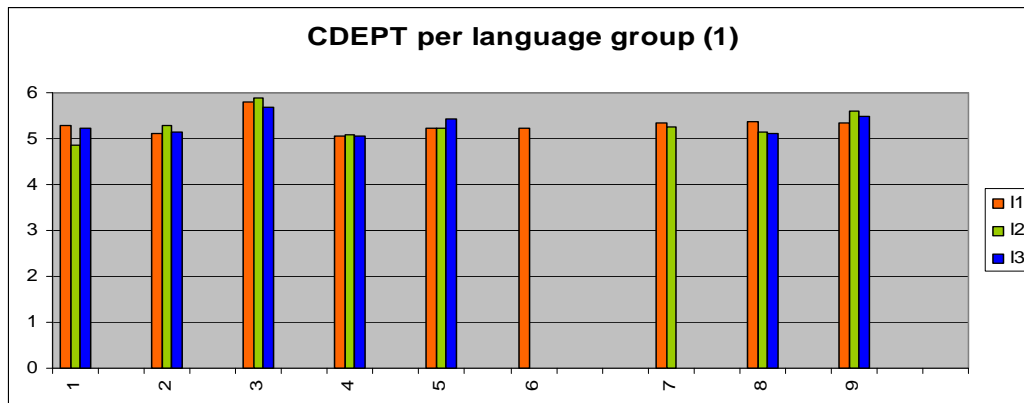
Figure 43: CDEPT per the AICF ethnic profile



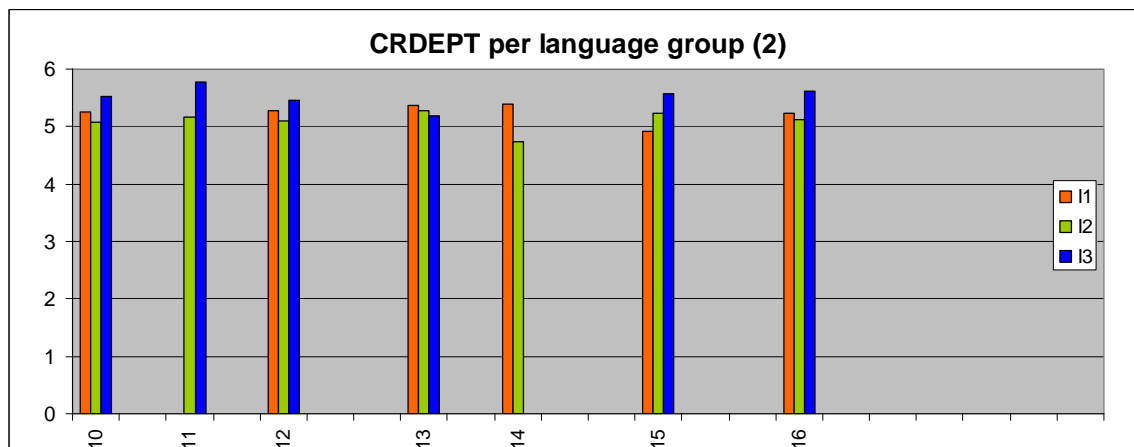
All ethnic groups seem to perceive the AICF as an opportunity to improve their professional interaction with other departments through the knowledge and relationships built with fellow Absa choir members from a wide range of departments/

branches/business units. In I2 (*figure 43*) Asian participants particularly seemed to value this aspect of the Absa choirs ( $m=6$ ). CDEPT received the lowest rating from respondents from “other” groups in I1 ( $m=4$ ).

*Figure 44a:* CDEPT per language group 1-9

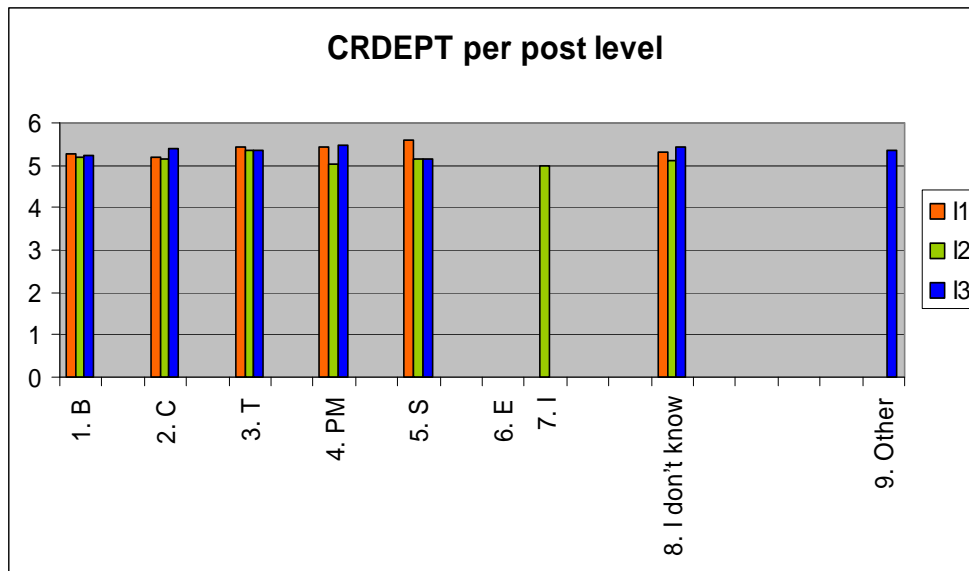


*Figure 44b:* CDEPT per language group 10-16



The lowest CDEPT rating, allocated in I2 by Zulu respondents/group 1, was 80% ( $m=4.85$  - see *figure 44a*). AICF participants across all language groups evidently viewed the opportunity to acquaint themselves with employees from other departments/divisions (through singing together in the Absa choirs) as beneficial to their work in Absa.

Figure 45: CDEPT per post-level employed at in Absa Bank



Respondents across the range of post levels represented in the AICF seem to have valued the opportunities created through choir to establish relationships, and thus better cooperation pathways in the bank, between employees employed at differing post levels (see figure 45 above).

The following summative ratings in figure 46a for factor 5 (CDEPT) demonstrate that respondents deem the networks formed through choir participation as enhancing their interactions with staff members from other departments/divisions in the bank. They thus perceive that choir participation has an advantageous impact to cross-departmental collaboration in their work.

Figure 46a: Summative ratings for CDEPT: I1-I3

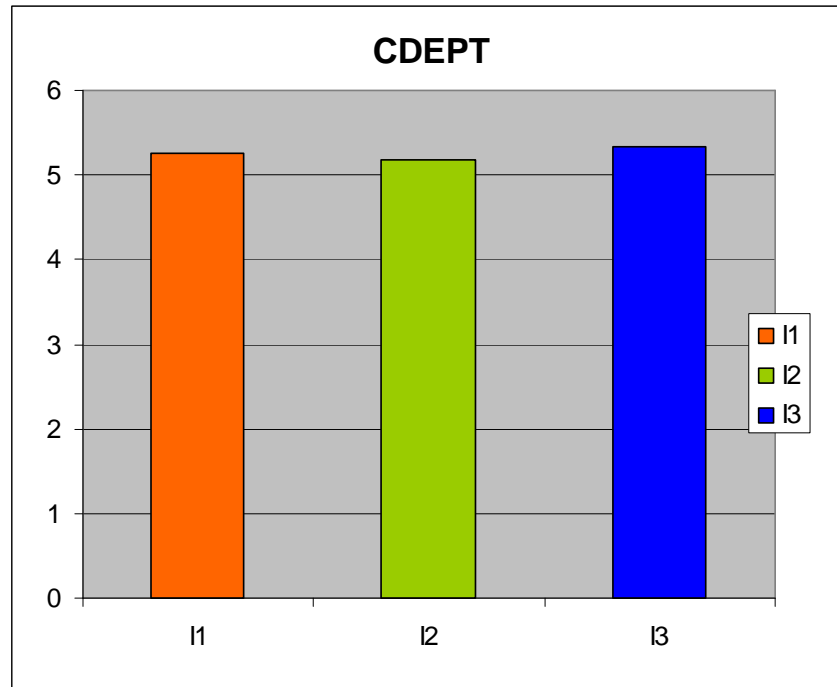


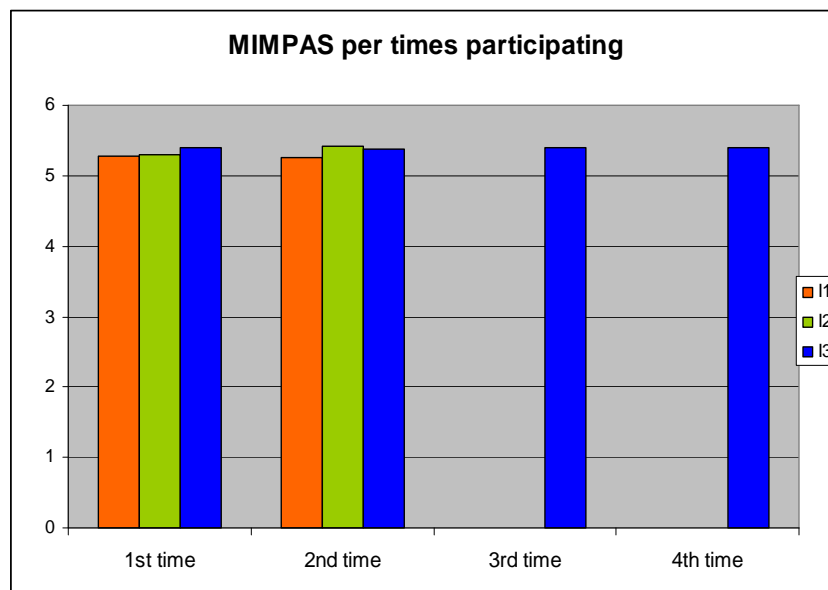
Figure 46b: Table of mean and Standard Error of C DEPT summative ratings

	<b>I1</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>I3</b>
<i>m:</i>	5.26	5.17	5.34
SEM:	0.038	0.071	0.061

### 5.3.6 Factor 6 - Absa does indeed view its staff as its “most important asset” (MIMPAS)

Absa employees participating for the second to fourth time are more positive that the AICF signals Absa’s appreciation for their employees (see *figure 47* below).

*Figure 47:* MIMPAS per number of times participating in the AICF



The following graph (*figure 48*) shows that AICF participants across all regions in the country interprets the choir project as confirmation that Absa indeed regards its staff as its most important asset.

Figure 48: MIMPAS per Absa region in South Africa

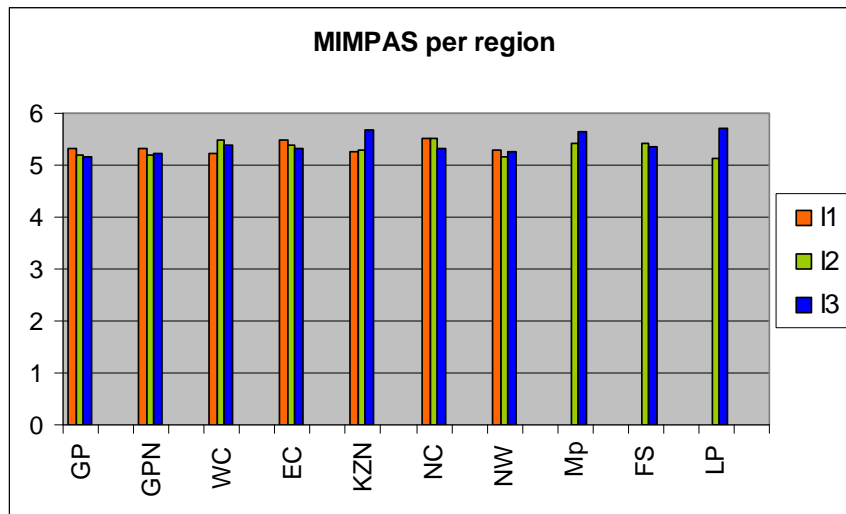
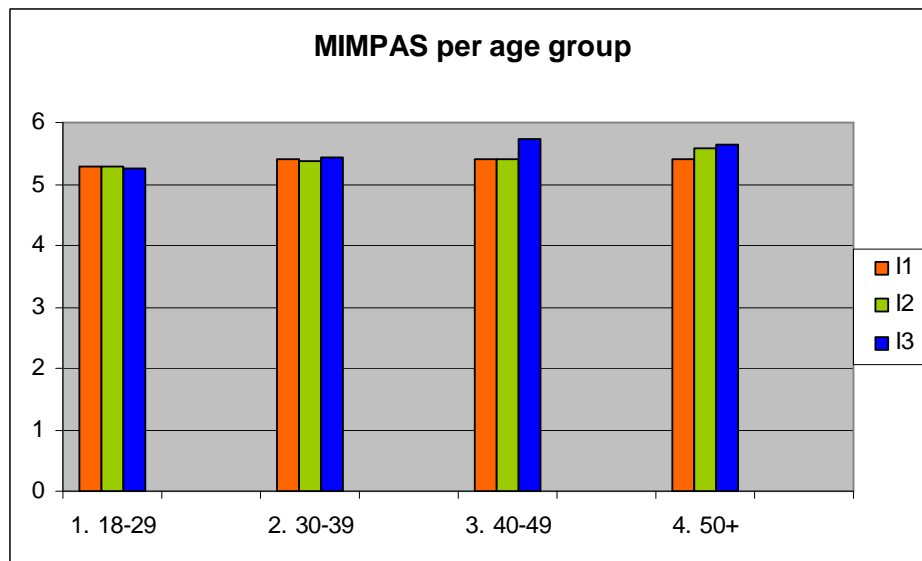
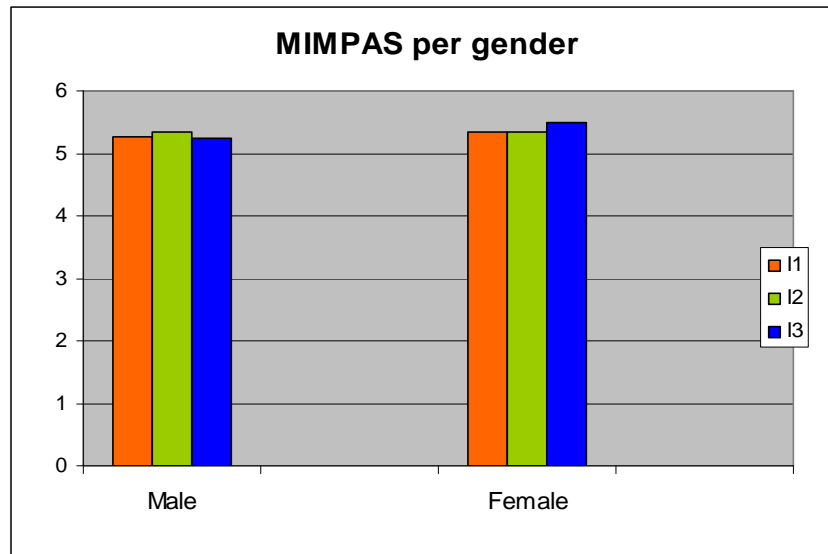


Figure 49: MIMPAS per the AICF age profile



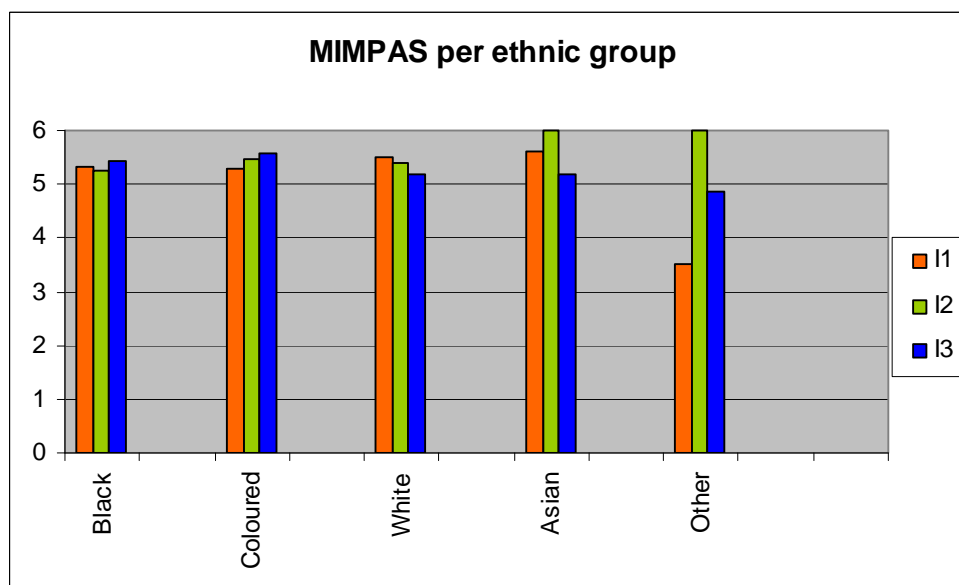
The 18-29 age group seems more critical of this factor than other groups (see *figure 49* above).

Figure 50: MIMPAS per the AICF gender profile



Data obtained from female respondents reflect that they believe that the AICF is evidence that Absa management care for the Absa staff (see figure 50 above).

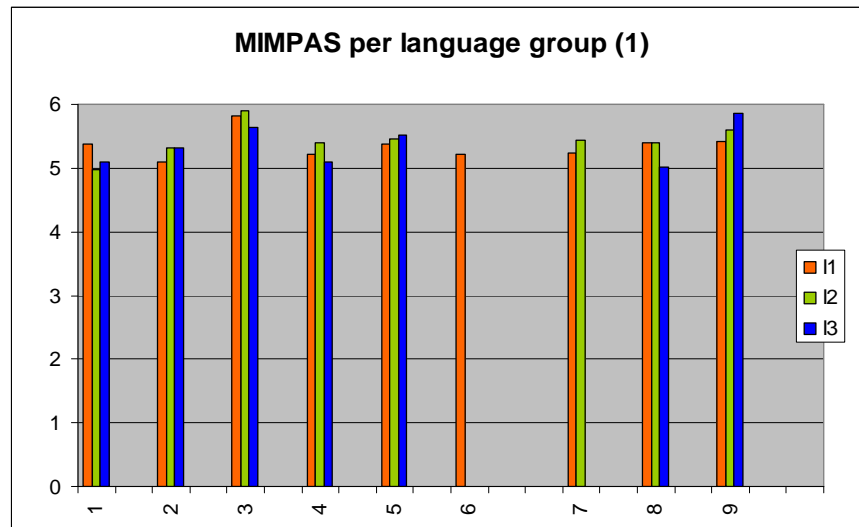
Figure 51: MIMPAS per the AICF ethnic profile



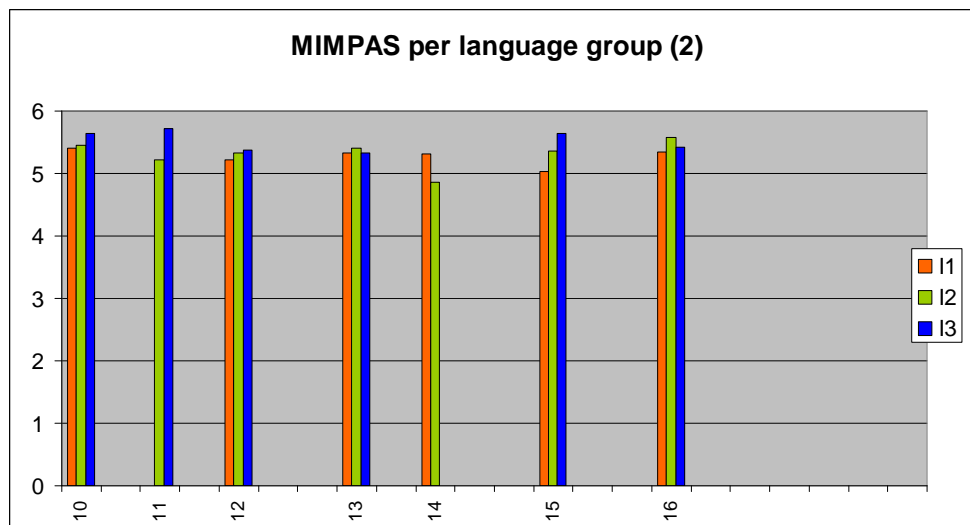


As seen in *figure 51* above, all ethnic groups (including Asian – the only cultural group in the country who do not have an established choral tradition) interpreted the AICF as a symbol of their value as employees to the employer (Absa Bank).

*Figure 52a:* MIMPAS per language group 1-9

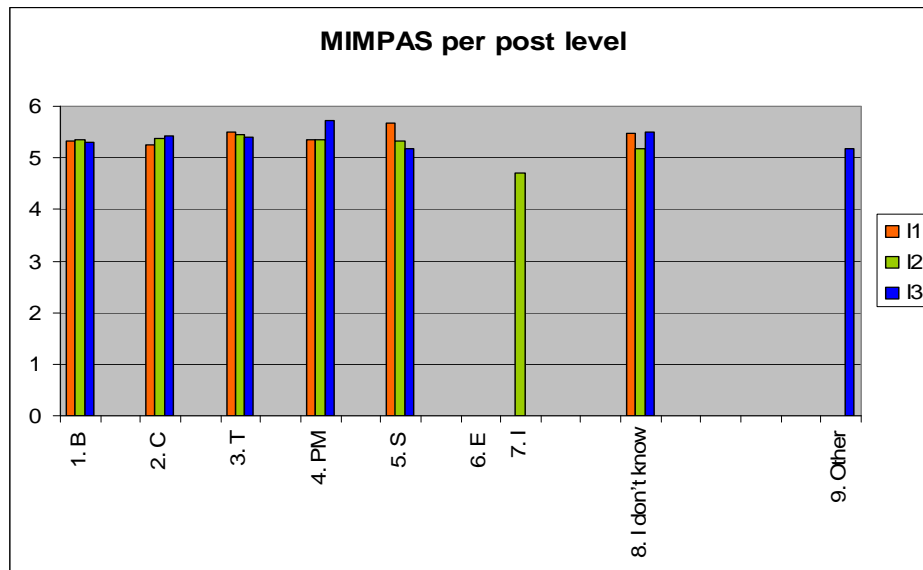


*Figure 52b:* MIMPAS per language group 10-16



AICF participants across all language groups positively responded to this factor in the survey, collectively expressing the view that the AICF is proof to the fact that Steve Booyesen and Absa care about their staff (see *figure 52a* and *b* above).

*Figure 53:* MIMPAS per post level employed at in Absa Bank



It is noteworthy that AICF participants across a range of post-levels within Absa, in I1, I2 as well as I3, have expressed the opinion that the AICF is a meaningful indication of their value to the bank.

The summative data for this factor (MIMPAS) - presented in *figure 54a* below - shows that, from year to year, AICF participants seem to be more confident that the choir project is an indicator of the esteem held by Absa for its staff.

Figure 54a: Summative ratings for MIMPAS: I1-I3

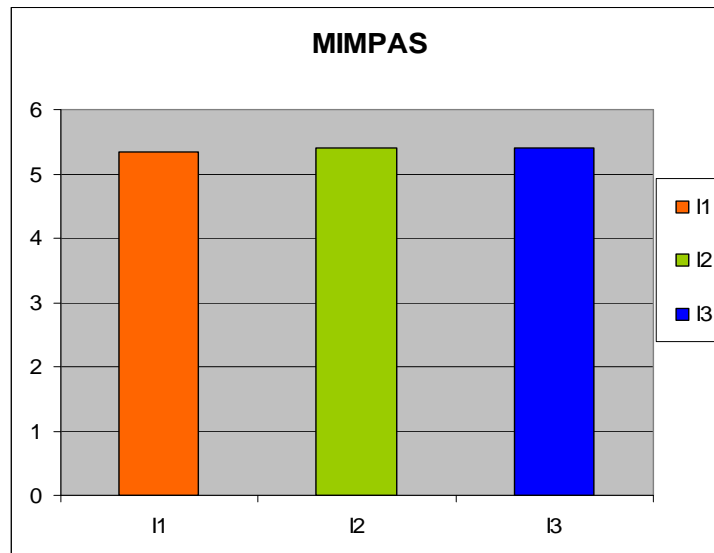


Figure 54b: Table of mean and Standard Error of MIMPAS summative ratings

	I1	I2	I3
<i>m:</i>	5.33	5.35	5.4
SEM:	0.036	0.04	0.059

### 5.3.7 Factor 1-6: Summative data

In conclusion, the statistics of the overall outcomes of the assessment of all six the factors by the entire sample (I1, I2 and I3) are portrayed in the final graph (*figure 55a*) and supplementary table (*figure 55b*).

The fact that the lowest collective score allocated for any factor in any intervention is equivalent to 85% ( $m=5.1$ ) – as seen in *figure 55a* and *b* - is collateral to accept the overwhelming positive effects of choral singing experienced in the AICF.

Figure 55a: Summative data for Section B (factors 1-6)

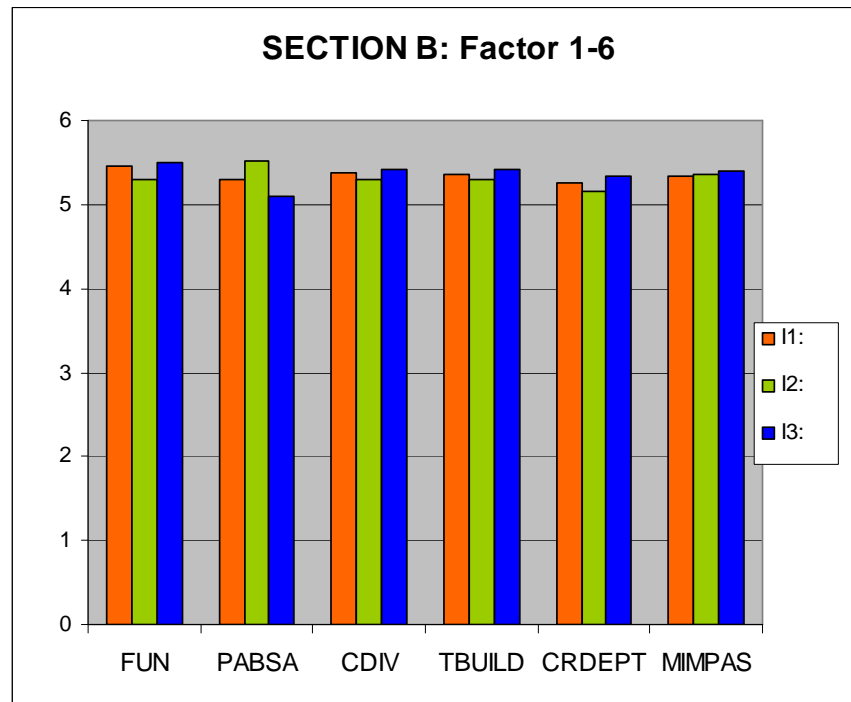


Figure 55b: Table of mean and Standard Error of Section B summative ratings

Factor:	FUN	PABSA	CDIV	TBUILD	CDEPT	MIMPAS
<b>I1:</b> <i>m</i> :	5.45	5.3	5.37	5.36	5.26	5.33
SEM:	0.033	0.035	0.034	0.032	0.038	0.036
<b>I2:</b> <i>m</i> :	5.3	5.51	5.29	5.3	5.16	5.35
SEM:	0.048	0.039	0.047	0.043	0.05	0.041
<b>I3:</b> <i>m</i> :	5.5	5.1	5.42	5.41	5.34	5.4
SEM:	0.055	0.050	0.054	0.049	0.061	0.06

The qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questions in Section C allows further insight of the perceptions of participants in the AICF. The following report conveys the personal views and experiences of the AICF as expressed by respondents.

## 5.4 Section C: Qualitative data

This section gathered qualitative data on individual participants' perceptions of obstacles, achievements and benefits experienced through participating in the AICF. Three open-ended questions (Question 9-11) were asked to investigate respondent perceptions of challenges, accomplishments and benefits presented through the choir process. In this section, the myriad comments received (through three interventions) were scrutinised to identify common themes amongst the many views expressed. Comments correlating to the themes identified were grouped together, counted and percentage values were calculated to depict the frequency of occurrence of themes. For each of the three questions in Section C, themes are discussed in sequence of the rate of recurrence<sup>22</sup>. The frequency (**f**) - calculated in percentage – is indicated next to each theme.

- **Question 9: List in order of priority the three most important obstacles you choir encountered in the process of building your choir**

Question 9 presented complications re interpreting the priority respondents placed on obstacles reported. For each intervention (I1, I2 and I3), obstacles relating to identified themes were counted and percentage values were allocated. There were three percentage values per theme (the questionnaire allocated an option per priority and the same obstacle was placed in different options by different respondents). This mounted to nine percentage values per theme. When consulting with statisticians on how to interpret the results in order to reflect the *order of priority* in a statistically responsible manner, the writer was advised to negate this condition and treat all obstacles indicated as equally important. In each case, the value indicated next to the theme represents the overall frequency percentage (**f**) of the theme. Fourteen themes transpired from the data and are numbered and introduced according to the sequence of the rate of recurrence.

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<sup>22</sup>

Themes are numbered to highlight prevalence of occurrence.

### 1. Music-related aspects: f = 20.8%

Obstacles reported include:

- Limited music knowledge of choir members;
- Lack of voice training;
- Problems with enunciation;
- Lack of music experience;
- Lack of choral singing experience;
- Difficulty finding a coach;
- Difficulty finding someone to assist with voice training;
- Training the conductor selected;
- Difficulty finding an accompanist; and
- Difficulty finding a venue conducive to practising choir.

Considering that the choirs consisted of ordinary bank employees, the fact that limited resources re music was most commonly perceived as an impediment to the development of their choir is understandable. One does not normally expect people who work in a banking environment to be music specialists. However, the high frequency of identifying the lack of music knowledge as an obstacle to choral singing could be indicative of an inadequate music education system in South African schools.

### 2. Discipline: f = 12.5%

Members were concerned about a number of discipline-related issues. These include:

- Choir members who arrive late for choir practices;
- Talking during practices; and
- Choir members not listening to the conductor.

### 3. Commitment: f = 12.1%

Respondents expressed great difficulty experienced in:



- Finding enough members;
- Finding more men to join the choir; and
- Persuading new members to stay committed to the choir.

Choir members conveyed that managers were not always sympathetic to the choir process and in some cases would not allow employees to join a choir. This is particularly problematic in areas where members have to travel long distances to choir practices: if a manager will not allow such a member time off to travel (often four and in some cases seven hours), he/she would arrive at the practice after it is over.

#### 4. Time: f = 11.3%

Although most of the practising takes place outside of work time, there are instances where members have to take time off work to travel or attend the AICF final.

Concerns relating to time include:

- Sacrifice of personal and family time;
- Time management became challenging;
- Time off work – respondents were concerned that where substitute staff were not employed, their work would fall behind; and
- Concerns for the times when their branches had to function without them.

#### 5. Transport: f = 6.3%

Public transport is often problematic in South Africa. Many respondents expressed struggling with transport to practice venues. Choir members in rural areas mentioned that the great distances between members were a challenge.

#### 6. Attendance: f = 6.2%

The sporadic attendance of some members encumbered the progress of the choir.



7. Diversity:  $f = 6$

Comments included:

- Intolerance of people from other races;
- Discussing problems in African languages which are not understood by some members; and
- Not respecting each other cultures.

8. Teamwork:  $f = 5.2\%$

Respondents noted:

- Lack of unity;
- Lack of cooperation;
- Poor teamwork; and
- Members not accommodating others' views.

9. Leadership:  $f = 4.4\%$

Concerns include:

- Management not really interested in the choir;
- Choir organiser does not provide leadership; and
- Managers are negative and/or do not support choir.

10. Trust:  $f = 4.2\%$

The following hindrances to building trust between members were indicated:

- Not trusting other choir members;
- Not transparent;
- Difficult to get to know one another;
- Lack of integrity;
- Lacking love for each other; and





- Lack of respect for each other.

#### 11. Conflict: $f = 3.9\%$

Concerns raised were:

- Conflict re own choice song; and
- Clashing of different personalities.

#### 12. Communication: $f = 2.8\%$

Respondents were concerned about:

- Poor communication between choir members;
- Misunderstandings; and
- Stereotyping of others.

#### 13. Dance: $f = 2.8\%$

White respondents noted that they found it very hard to learn the African movements, and Black respondents noted that they found it very hard to teach the White members the African dance movements.

#### 14. Finances: $f = 1.5\%$

Before the global economic crisis in 2008, this obstacle had never been mentioned. Although the obstacle with the lowest overall rating, upon analysing the third intervention data, finance-related obstacles received the sixth highest rating in that intervention:  $f = 5.62$  (mentioned for the first time in I3). It is clear that the international recession has spread its tentacles to a choir festival in South Africa – the AICF.

The next question intended to learn what respondents perceived to be their choir's greatest achievement.

- **Question 10: List the one greatest achievement of your choir**

The seven themes which transpired from scrutinizing the data obtained for this question bear some correlation to the factors which formed the basis for the quantitative data obtained through Section B. However, in this section respondents expressed their personal perceptions of their choir's greatest achievement. Themes are numbered and introduced according to the sequence of the rate of recurrence.

1. Unity/Teambuilding: f = 41.22%

Despite the initial problems re conflict, lack of trust and teamwork reflected in the responses to Question 9, it is clear that the choirs had developed together as one team. Comments included:

- Our teamwork has become very good;
- We have great team spirit;
- I now have a sense of belonging;
- We have great cooperation in our choir;
- We have become a team;
- There is a great sense of togetherness in our choir;
- Unity – we are one; and
- Overcoming disagreements.

Booyesen and Absa's venture to utilise choral singing to attain teambuilding goals are in correspondence with current international trends. Examples of numerous business enterprises incorporating choir workshops for corporate teambuilding can be found on the internet. In the United Kingdom the insurance group Admiral is reported to have hired two vocal coaches to develop a choir of more than 40 call centre staff members to reduce "stress and sickness absence" (Guru 2009). Jonathan Welch, accomplished Australian choir conductor, has noted: "Music and singing is really the same as what we do in business ... within the structure and rhythmic formality of music, like that of running a

business, you still have to find your own way to “dance” and work as a team” (ICMI s.a.).

The above perceptions of AICC participants re the teambuilding and social benefits afforded through singing in a choir correlate with findings of related national and international surveys:

- Clift and Hancox (2001:255) state that 87% of the 84 members of a university college choir society indicated social benefits through the choir;
- Clift et al (2007) report that the vast majority of the 1,124 respondents in an extensive cross-national choral survey attributed an increased sense of coherence and community to choral singing, with 87% of respondents reporting social benefits experienced;
- Findings of a survey done amongst multi-cultural university choirs revealed that choir members experienced a genuine sense of community in their (multi-cultural) choirs (Barrett 2007:53);
- Simkin (2006) testifies to the value of choir participation for developing a sense of belonging/community in the Australian choral outreach for victims of Hurricane Katrina (discussed on page 17): “People now see the choir as a way of ... making new friendships, understanding how other people have been affected and how they can help each other”.

The results of these undertakings are echoed in the experiences of AICF participants expressed in this survey.

## 2. Musical achievement: f = 39.29%

Notwithstanding the awareness of and focus on lacking musical knowledge, experience, leadership and equipment reported by respondents (music-related obstacles received the highest frequency in the previous question), respondents experienced a great sense of achievement through their musical (choral) performance. The following were noted:

- Our choir achieved great success;



- Musically we did great;
- I am proud of our accomplishment;
- We were very good; and
- We did it!

### 3. Unity in (cultural) diversity: f = 6.2%

Comments included:

- We have learnt to appreciate each others' cultures;
- We are not so different – we are one;
- I now want to learn a Black language;
- I am now very proud of our cultural diversity;
- We understand each other much better, and each others' culture;
- We have made friends with people from other races and we love each other;
- In our choir we have overcome racism.

### 4. Broadened horizons: f = 5.41%

Respondents were appreciative of having had the opportunity to travel – many had never been outside their provinces and had the opportunity to come to Johannesburg and stay in hotels. A number also had the opportunity to travel by air for the first time in their lives. Some were part of the 2005 Most Popular Choir which was invited to Barclays (Britain) to perform and felt that this was the greatest achievement of their choir.

### 5. Discipline: f = 3.63%

Choir members have overcome their lack of discipline. Comments in this regard include:

- We have achieved discipline;
- Everybody is now committed;
- People are trying hard to be on time for practices; and
- We are listening to our conductor.

6. Cross-Department relations:  $f = 2.53\%$

Relationships and friendships were established with fellow choir members from other departments, branches and divisions.

7. Fun:  $f = 1.72\%$

The low frequency of this aspect should not be interpreted as participants not enjoying their AICF choral experience – this only indicates that 1.72% of respondents felt that they had so much fun becoming a choir, that they regarded it as their greatest achievement. References to “stress-relief” were also grouped in this cluster.

From the results of Question 11 it is clear that participants viewed their sense of musical achievement as outweighing the obstacles encountered (Question 9). It also bears evidence that, particularly through choral singing, non-music specialists can enjoy the experience of musical accomplishment given the opportunity and the willingness to work at it.

The last question was aimed at establishing if/how participants have benefited on a personal level through choir participation in the AICF.

- **Question 11: Please indicate the single greatest benefit to you personally by participating in the choir festival**

The results of the above question are presented in sequence of highest-lowest frequency (indicated as  $f$ ). The following comments of how participants perceive having profited on a personal level from participating in the AICF were obtained through I1-I3. It was interesting to note that choir participation had affected many people in similar ways regardless of the time of the intervention (over the period 2006-2008), or belonging to different language, age, and/or other groups identified in Section A of the questionnaire.

Eight themes transpired from the data obtained through Question 11. These themes are numbered and introduced according to the sequence of the rate of recurrence.

1. Teambuilding:  $f = 28.7\%$

Respondents viewed an improved sense of belonging to the ‘Absa family’. Comments include:

- I have made connections with people from other branches
- I have learnt to be a better team player;
- Getting to know my colleagues with whom I spend a great deal of time;
- Experiencing our team spirit;
- Togetherness - a sense of belonging;
- I have learnt to cooperate with others;
- I belong to a group where I feel appreciated; and
- The people in my choir respect me.

2. Mood:  $f = 26.2\%$

Singing in an Absa choir had a positive influence on the mood of singers. Participants reported the following mood-related results of partaking in the AICF:

- Feeling good;
- Experiencing a sense of victory (even before the final competition);
- Increased confidence;
- Increased happiness;
- Joy;
- Stress relief;
- Personal sense of self worth;
- Increased self-esteem;
- More positive behaviour; and
- Relaxation, peace.

A growing body of research indicates the particular value of choral singing to improve one's mood. Examples include:

- A three year study, “Creativity and Aging: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults,” led by the director of the Center on Aging, Health, and Humanities at George Washington University in Washington, Dr. Gene D. Cohen, shows that singing in a choir keeps people “healthier and happier” (Sparks 2004);
- Clift and Hancox (2001) reported that 75% of respondents perceived choir participation as a constructive practice for emotional wellbeing;
- Clift et al (2007) convey many cases of respondents reporting that choral singing helped them through periods of personal hardship or bereavement.

### 3. Cultural diversity: $f = 10.1\%$

Participants appreciated the experience of learning and participating in own and other cultural songs with choir members from other cultures:

- I think differently about cultures that I didn't know much of before;
- I feel that others are more positive about my culture;
- I want to learn an African language;
- I have learnt African dancing;
- We manage to teach White people how to dance to our music;
- We have achieved real communication between members from different cultures;
- I love the new friendships with people who speak other languages; and
- We are from different cultures but we are together.

A perception of having profited through learning or teaching African dance accounted for 25% of the frequency of this theme.

#### 4. Musical growth: $f = 9.8$

The following comments indicate that non-musicians participating in musicking activities through the AICF experienced personal growth, development and a sense of accomplishment through choral singing:

- I did not realise how musical I am;
- My family and friends are amazed at my talent;
- I now know that I can sing – I am musical;
- I know so much more about music;
- I have gained a lot of recognition for my musical talent;
- People look at me differently after I sang the solo;
- I love music more than ever before; and
- Singing in the Massed Choir was one of the most moving experiences of my life.

#### 5. Pride in, love for Absa: $f = 4.1\%$

Participating in the AICF has impacted on the way choir members relate to the organisation. Respondents reported:

- I never want to work anywhere else;
- I am proud to be associated with Absa;
- I care about my company;
- I love Absa;
- It is a privilege to work for Absa.

The above comments indicate that the Project Manager and her team manage the AICF in a manner that contributes to participants' perception of the stature of the organisation.

#### 6. Enrichment by exposure to new environments: $f = 1.8$

Some AICF participants felt a positive influence from traveling to and singing in places that they had not been familiar with before. They mentioned:





- Traveling to the final;
- Seeing Johannesburg; and
- Performing in different places with different people.

#### 7. Developing leadership skills: $f = 1.55$

Comments:

- I have grown as a leader; and
- I have learnt to motivate people and give advice.

The outcomes of both quantitative and qualitative data obtained through the questionnaire, over three interventions and a period of two years, unmistakably indicate that AICF participants have a particularly high opinion of their choral experience through the Absa Internal Choir Festival. Interviews and discussions with choir members, managers and external service providers to the AICF support the outcomes of the questionnaire. Video footage captured on the DVD bears further witness to the positive perceptions that exist of this phenomenon: utilising an internal choir festival (in the format of a competition) as tool for positive change within a pre-eminent bank in Africa.

#### 8. Singing in the choir helped me through a difficult time: $f = 1.05$

A few respondents reported that participating in the AICF helped them through a time of particular adversity in their personal lives. Comments included:

Nobody knew that I was going through great difficulty, but the choir was a life-line; and  
Singing in the choir helped me through great hardship.

The outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative data obtained through Sections B and C strongly indicate that participants believe that the Absa Internal Choir Festival has promoted teambuilding and transformation amongst participating Absa staff.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions and Recommendations

[The true power of singing is that of] communicating ideas and passions and music through the medium of another human or group of humans. It is a very big idea: that singing enhances and balances lives and can be so powerful a force that people without it feel bereft and diminished (Chapman 2006:264).

This study investigated the Absa Internal Choir Festival to assess the suitability of choral singing as catalyst for transformation and teambuilding in a corporate environment such as Absa Bank. Unique to this study is the banding together of theories relating to organisational development (Chapter 2) and the inherent power in music and musicking (Chapter 3) for positive change. This affords a focused understanding of the potential role of music in fields not traditionally associated with music education.

In Chapter 4 Absa is introduced as an influential organisation in South Africa. Absa operates within all the economic, political and socio-economic realities germane to a young democracy in Africa. In a milieu characterised by persistent mergers and acquisitions, the history of the Absa Group is crammed with challenges related to transformation and the recurrent building of new teams. It is therefore particularly significant that the investigation of choir participation as a tool for transformation and teambuilding was undertaken within Absa Bank.

Steve Booyesen, Group Chief Executive of the Absa Group, is the originator of the Absa Internal Choir Festival. A prominent business leader in the country, Booyesen is renowned for his original thinking and ground-breaking approach to doing business in the South African corporate world. Booyesen is attributed with a number of pioneering initiatives in banking – ‘firsts’ in South Africa – which have impacted positively on the face and assets of Absa and profited the South African economy. An example of this thinking is the Absa alliance with an international banking force, the British Barclays Group. This was a milestone in South African banking business history.

The Absa Internal Choir Festival is one more such enterprise. Booyesen instinctively instigated a ‘very big idea’ when he initiated a choir project to promote teambuilding and fun, also serving as a supporting measure for Absa staff during the time of the merger with Barclays Bank. Booyesen (2007) expresses the belief that a balanced life is an important factor in the promotion of contented and productive employees. He envisaged the choir project as a platform for fun, social interaction and building relationships with fellow Absa employees of differing demographic backgrounds, cultures and positions in the bank. In contemplating what it is that constitutes a “soulful organisation”, Briskin and Peppers (2001:14) conclude that it is the intention and ability to balance and respect the inward complexity of each of its employees with the needs and values of the institution. In valuing balance in the lives of staff members, Booyesen (and Absa) have distinguished the bank as a soulful organisation.

In the development of the Absa Internal Choir Festival, a few meaningful links proved to be determining factors in the success of the project. These include:

- The choir project is the flagship of the Group Chief Executive of the organisation. Schein (1992:12) notes that cultural change is best possible when instigated by the leaders of a society, as ‘cultural architects’. A venture on this scale needs to be authorised and enthused by top management to secure success;
- Mostert, Project Manager for the Absa Internal Choir Festival, is a qualified music teacher with experience and understanding of choral music and choir-related issues. Further, prior experience gained through founding the National Eisteddfod Academy had afforded her considerable social and also cultural capital (as discussed in Chapter 4); and
- Mostert created partnerships with reputable external institutions to manage the music-related facets of the project. Such a partnership was formed in 2007 with the author, supported by her university through the Wits Enterprise. In this capacity she has been acting as external service provider to the project.

Responsibilities include composing the annual Absa song; presenting choral workshops and overseeing the training of the choirs; adjudicating semi-final competitions; conducting the massed choir and acting as musical director for the annual final event of the Absa Internal Choir Festival.

This unique combination of role players has collectively engendered the exceptional development of Absa's choir project thus far.

## 6.1 Conclusions

The main **research question** of the study was:

How and to what extent can choir participation be a successful tool for transformation and teambuilding in a corporate environment like Absa Bank?

**Sub-questions** also posed in Chapter 1 were the following:

- Based on current theories of the concepts, what is the meaning of transformation and teambuilding in a post-Apartheid South African society?
- To what extent are the values presented by the African philosophy of Ubuntu reaffirmed through choral singing and the Absa Internal Choir Festival?
- How does the process of developing an Absa choir link up with the concept of social capital in a corporate South African context?
- Which elements inherent in choral singing could be contributing factors to attaining extra-musical outcomes?
- To what extent does the Absa Internal Choir Festival achieve the outcomes envisaged from its introduction?

The research questions will now all be answered in the discussion which follows.

The literature review (Chapter 2) reveals that authentic transformation is a challenging process which involves changing a person's perceptions of fundamental truths about people and the world. Transformation of the individual is affected by transformation of his/her world. In post-Apartheid South Africa, a truly transformed society is unlikely to occur without transformation of human interaction and communication. Such interaction between people of different race and language groups needs to be initiated.

Since its inception in 2005, the AICF has accommodated significant interaction and communication between Absa employees of differing cultural and language backgrounds. Despite the inability of choir members to speak all the languages represented in the choirs, shared communicative experiences were facilitated through the music they sang together. As illustrated in Chapter 5, respondents have unambiguously reported increased understanding of and respect for choir members from dissimilar cultural backgrounds through singing together in an Absa choir. Graphs (pp 122-126) reflect the high scores allocated for improved cross-cultural relations experienced through singing in an Absa choir. Qualitative data (Section C) obtained through the questionnaire reflects that 6.2% of respondents viewed improved cross-cultural relations as the most important achievement of their choir, while 10.1% indicated that improved relations with members of other cultures was the most important personal benefit. Interviews recorded on the supplementary DVD further illustrate that participating in Absa choirs afforded Absa employees of different cultures opportunities to build relationships and teams with members of different cultures. In a society where this type of transformational change is sorely needed, these outcomes are particularly noteworthy.

The results of the questionnaire further show that the AICF successfully facilitated teambuilding amongst Absa choir members. It is important to note that the concept of 'team' in these choirs necessarily incorporates the notion of transformation in that these are multicultural choirs. One can therefore assume that, to at least an extent, results obtained for teambuilding contain elements of transformation.

Qualitative data obtained through Section C indicates that a significant number of respondents (41.22%) viewed teambuilding as the single most important achievement of their choir, while 28.7% reported that, on a personal level, learning to be part of a team and/or becoming a better team player was the most significant consequence of their choral experience. Many respondents particularly valued the sense of belonging which they experienced in the choir. This sense of belonging fulfils a deep need in human beings and counteracts feelings of alienation, of being an outsider and of not making a worthwhile contribution to society. Interviewees recorded on the supplementary DVD underscore the success of the AICF in regards to teambuilding.

The literature review (Chapter 2) further elucidates the Ubuntu philosophy of finding one's selfhood through others and argues that this viewpoint can aid in lessening people's natural resistance to change in South Africa. Booysen (2007) notes that "the choir has thrown together people and forced them to learn about each others' cultures". Interaction between Absa employees outside the working environment has been an objective of Absa's choir project. Ubuntu believes that relationships with others are influenced by exposure between self and others through occasions of informal interaction. Additionally, the sharing of cultural experiences and modes of communication from the others' lifeworlds through the singing of their songs - often in the unfamiliar mother tongue of the other – produce such influence on relationships with others.

Respondents have testified that the interaction that takes place through singing in Absa choirs change their perceptions of and relationships with 'the other'. Ubuntu predicts that this influence on the relationship will influence the humanness of self. The results of the questionnaire indicate that their perceptions of choir members from differing backgrounds/races/cultures changed through the choir.

Social capital considers the individual in terms of his/her trusting relations, interactions and networks with others and the community. Numerous AICF participants testified that the development of trusting relationships and cohesive 'choral communities' were products of singing in the Absa choirs. The outcomes of this study (Chapter 5) suggest

that the Absa Internal Choir Festival profitably invests in social capital through establishing networks of mutual trust and reciprocity.

Music is particularly renowned for its capacity to intensify emotions and unify groups of people towards a common goal. Singing holds numerous and wide-ranging benefits for the singer. Claims include:

- Singing increases lung function and breathing;
- Singing releases endorphins into the singer's system, thus elating his/her mood;
- Singing boosts the immune system; and
- Singing produces relaxation and stress relief.

Welch (2005:254) notes the following benefits of singing which are of particular interest to this study:

- Singing can be a form of group identification and social bonding. In choirs where significant diversity occurs, singing can also facilitate social bridging. Welch alludes to the use of “specially composed company songs” for reinforcing a senior management's definition of company culture. This is especially relevant to the Absa song, composed annually for the AICF;
- Singing can be a transformational activity culturally, through the fusion of elements presented in the music traditions of the diverse cultures within the choir;
- Singing can be used as an agent in the communication of social change.

The outcomes of this investigation clearly show that respondents experienced this capacity of music through participating in the AICF. There is a great need to unify South Africans of differing cultures toward an integrated society and future. The motivation for utilising the possibilities of choral singing to promote healing and nation building in South Africa are therefore exceedingly appropriate.

The overwhelmingly positive results of the questionnaire illustrate that the AICF serves as a lucrative resource for enjoyment and fun, corporate pride, improved interaction

between employees of different ethnic groups, teambuilding and unity, improved cross-departmental collaboration and a stronger belief that Absa values their staff as their most important asset.

Booyesen (2008 DVD: Scene 5) notes that the AICF has surpassed all expectations, clearly answering to the fifth research sub-question as to the extent to which the AICF has achieved the outcomes envisaged from its inception.

In concluding, the following comments by Booyesen dismiss any uncertainty that might still exist as to the suitability of choir participation as tool for transformation and teambuilding in Absa Bank:

When the idea of the choir was first floated, it was largely to give the employees of Absa the opportunity to have fun, socialise and get to know each other on a non-work related level. It has certainly achieved those three objectives, and so much more. The truth is: at the time we had no idea what was taking root. This initiative has transformed people's lives, produced lessons that, for all concerned, we could not have imagined. It has brought business benefits no training program could hope to imitate (2007 DVD: Scene 4).

The AICF, as Absa's daring venture to capitalise on the power of choral singing as an investment in their human capital, unmistakably demonstrates the suitability of choir to:

- 1) facilitate reciprocity between South Africans of differing cultural and language backgrounds, so promoting transformation;
- 2) smooth the progress of cooperation within the group/choir, so promoting teambuilding;
- and 3) improve individual and group wellbeing in more ways than could be envisaged when this study commenced.



## 6.2 Recommendations

The Absa Internal Choir Festival illustrates the extraordinary success of choir participation as a tool for transformation and teambuilding amongst choir members of different race, language, age and geographical groups. The data obtained through this investigation shows that, through building and maintaining the morale and team spirit of participating staff, the AICF serves as a source of support and inspiration for Absa employees. The author suggests a number of recommendations following the positive outcomes of this study.

- The success of the choir project and its positive effect on participating employees merit that Absa continues the choir project even in the face of the current global financial climate; and
- Absa's strong commitment to the arts and their staff is evident in the AICF. This could be aptly illustrated and publicised by showcasing audiovisual material of Absa choirs and the Absa Internal Choir Festival at events and television broadcasts of events sponsored by Absa, such as the Absa soccer and rugby cups and *Noot vir Noot*. This point will be put in writing and sent to the relevant departments and top management of Absa by the author.

Further, in the current South African society many people have become disillusioned by prolonged racism as well as a scarcity of harmonious neighbourliness and unity. This is perpetuated by serious challenges re poverty, crime, politics, health care and education. The outcomes of this study undeniably demonstrate that Absa has developed a successful concept for utilising choral singing as a meaningful tool for transformation, team and spirit building. In this regard the author proposes the following, and will do so directly to the Absa top management:

Absa would do well to bring the above to the attention of:

- Other major South African corporations;
  - Influential cultural role players in the country (including religious institutions); as well as
  - Those government departments where severe challenges have eroded the morale of public servants, such as the departments of Arts and Culture, Education, Correctional Services, Health and Police.
  - Based on the success of the project, the AICF can serve as a model for the above mentioned institutions to build the morale of South Africans and realise cohesion and nation building amid the rich cultural diversity typifying the country.
- Therefore:

As a prominent benefactor of social investment in South Africa, Absa should channel a portion of their social responsibility investment for promoting this model for transformation and team/nation building and provide mentorship for departments and organisations to implement similar choir projects. Absa can also commission songs composed to promote hope, inspiration and nation building with accompanying/backtracking CDs. The author intends to publicise this view by writing articles in both academic journals and more popular reading matter. Preliminary discussions with the AICF project manager have commenced in regards to the above. This suggestion, too, will be made to the Absa top management in writing by the author, together with a copy of this whole thesis.

The overwhelmingly positive results of the AICF investigation of choir participation as a tool for positive change certainly indicate that the eminence and role of choral singing in South African society could provide appealing and persuasive packaging for transformation and team/nation building in South Africa.

The investigation of the AICF as a means to increase employee pride in Absa (factor 2 - PABSA) uncovered a very interesting divergence between the age groups 40+ and 50+. These results could suggest that employees in the 40+ age group are more prone to competition-related stress, and that this has a negative impact on the ir sense of corporate



pride while the opposite seemed true of the 50+ group. As this could have significant consequences for work performance, a research study investigating this possible phenomenon could be of particular value to employers.

Further research examining the significance of specific music elements contained in the music sung in the AICF for promoting transformation and teambuilding would augment the scope of this investigation in the field of music education.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **The questionnaire**



Faculty of Humanities  
Office of the Dean  
2008-05-20

Dear Choir Member,

As a music educator I was deeply moved by the musical experiences created through the Absa choir project over the last three years. I am very excited that this very same choir project has been accepted as the topic for my doctorate in music education (D.Mus.) by the University of Pretoria.

The attached questionnaire forms the basis of my research through which I hope to validate the accomplishments that came through your hard work and dedication. You are hereby invited to participate in this survey by completing the attached questionnaire.

However:

1. Participation is in no way obligatory; you are participating on a completely voluntary basis. Should you wish to abandon your role of observer in this research project, information obtained through your contribution will be extracted from the body of data.
2. This is an anonymous survey and the respondent's identity is nowhere required on the questionnaire.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could complete the entire questionnaire. The success of this study relies on you, the respondent to answer each question thoughtfully.

Please note:

- While it might appear that some of the questions repeat themselves and do not necessarily follow a particular order, I assure you that there is a definite purpose in this.
- There are no right or wrong answers and questionnaires will remain anonymous. Your honest opinions and experiences are valid and appreciated.

Thank you for your co-operation, time and effort.

Yours in music,

Alta van As



**QUESTIONNAIRE: Absa CHOIR FESTIVAL**

Respondent

Please answer each question by drawing a circle around the appropriate number in a shaded box or by writing your answer in the shaded box provided.

**SECTION A BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. Is this the **first** time you have participated in the Absa Choir Festival?

Yes	1
No	2

2. What **region** does your choir come from?

3. What is your **age** in completed years?

4. What is your **gender**?

Male	1
Female	2

5. To which **ethnic group** do you belong?

6. What **language** or languages do you speak at **home**?

For Office Use

V1 


 1

V2 

--

 5

V3 

--	--

 6

V4 

--	--

 8

V5 

--

 10

V6 

--	--

 11

V7 

--	--

 13



For Office Use

7. What **level** in Absa are you **employed** at?

B	1
C	2
T	3
P	4
M	5
S	6
E	7
I don't know	8
Other (specify):	

V8   15

**SECTION B** **OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

8. Please read each of the statements below and answer them using the scale

- 1 = *msd* I *most strongly disagree*  
 2 = *sd* I *strongly disagree*  
 3 = *d* I *slightly disagree*  
 4 = *a* I *slightly agree*  
 5 = *sa* I *strongly agree*  
 6 = *msa* I *most strongly agree*

	Statement	msd	sd	d	a	sa	msa	
8.1	Realising that our choir needs and relies on me as a choir member makes me feel part of the team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V9 <input type="text"/> 17
8.2	Absa wants me to experience an increased sense of belonging to the Absa team through participating in the Choir project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V10 <input type="text"/> 18
8.3	I have experienced a sense of camaraderie with my fellow choir members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V11 <input type="text"/> 19
8.4	We are able to resolve conflict situations in our choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V12 <input type="text"/> 20
8.5	Singing in an Absa choir makes me feel privileged to be employed by this bank.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V13 <input type="text"/> 21
8.6	I would like to sing in an Absa choir again in future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V14 <input type="text"/> 22
8.7	Participating in this project that involves so many Absa employees gives me an increased feeling of belonging to the greater Absa team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V15 <input type="text"/> 23
8.8	Experiencing the songs from different South African cultural groups gives me an increased sense of pride in our cultural diversity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V16 <input type="text"/> 24
8.9	Singing together with people from other departments gives me a greater appreciation of the work they do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V17 <input type="text"/> 25



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**SECTION B (cont.) OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

8. Please read each of the statements below and answer them using the scale

- 1 = *msd* I most strongly disagree
- 2 = *sd* I strongly disagree
- 3 = *d* I slightly disagree
- 4 = *a* I slightly agree
- 5 = *sa* I strongly agree
- 6 = *msa* I most strongly agree

	Statement	msd	sd	d	a	sa	msa		
8.10	I look forward to choir practices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V18	<input type="text"/> 26
8.11	I will miss the choir activities after the competition is over.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V19	<input type="text"/> 27
8.12	Through initiating and creating this opportunity Dr. Steve Booyesen indicates that Absa is interested in me as a human being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V20	<input type="text"/> 28
8.13	Absa intends for this project to spur growth in employees as individuals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V21	<input type="text"/> 29
8.14	I feel pride in representing Absa through our choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V22	<input type="text"/> 30
8.15	Participating in this project motivates me to believe that the Absa team can achieve even greater things tomorrow.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V23	<input type="text"/> 31
8.16	Singing with employees from varying departments in the bank gives me a better personal understanding of the work they do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V24	<input type="text"/> 32
8.17	Singing in our choir has a positive influence on my mood.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V25	<input type="text"/> 33
8.18	I am learning in the choir to share on a more personal level with people from other ethnic groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V26	<input type="text"/> 34
8.19	I feel better connected with members of other departments because of singing with them in the choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V27	<input type="text"/> 35
8.20	The choir is an activity of unifying grounds for employees of different cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V28	<input type="text"/> 36
8.21	Through the choir project, I believe that Absa turned words into deeds concerning their slogan " <b>Today, tomorrow, together.</b> "	1	2	3	4	5	6	V29	<input type="text"/> 37
8.22	I believe that Absa appreciates what we have accomplished in our choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V30	<input type="text"/> 38
8.23	This project has the employees' best interest at heart.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V31	<input type="text"/> 39
8.24	Singing in the choir strengthens my feeling of identifying with the " <b>Today, tomorrow, together</b> " slogan.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V32	<input type="text"/> 40



**SECTION B (cont.) OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

8. Please read each of the statements below and answer them using the scale

- 1 = *msd* I most strongly disagree
- 2 = *sd* I strongly disagree
- 3 = *d* I slightly disagree
- 4 = *a* I slightly agree
- 5 = *sa* I strongly agree
- 6 = *msa* I most strongly agree

	Statement	msd	sd	d	a	sa	msa		
8.25	The choir has broadened my view of the range of departments throughout Absa.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V33	<input type="checkbox"/> 41
8.26	Together we have overcome the challenges that faced our choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V34	<input type="checkbox"/> 42
8.27	I commend Absa for successfully motivating so many employees to participate in this project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V35	<input type="checkbox"/> 43
8.28	Building a choir with colleagues from other departments improves co-operation towards common Absa goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V36	<input type="checkbox"/> 44
8.29	In choir practices I have the opportunity to interact more freely with people from different cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V37	<input type="checkbox"/> 45
8.30	I enjoy singing the songs from other cultures in the choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V38	<input type="checkbox"/> 46
8.31	I feel proud of my bank for being the first to initiate such a project for their employees.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V39	<input type="checkbox"/> 47
8.32	I value the interaction with my fellow choir members during practices and other choir-related activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V40	<input type="checkbox"/> 48
8.33	Participating in the Choir project suggests that Absa wants me to be a well-balanced human being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V41	<input type="checkbox"/> 49
8.34	I would find it easier to help solve conflict situations with people from other departments who sang with me in the choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V42	<input type="checkbox"/> 50
8.35	Singing in the choir with employees from different departments helps me to see the importance of co-operation between departments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V43	<input type="checkbox"/> 51
8.36	I have mastered the performance of different cultural songs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V44	<input type="checkbox"/> 52
8.37	The choir affords me a non-threatening opportunity to work closely with people from different cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V45	<input type="checkbox"/> 53
8.38	Despite the hard work involved in mastering the music, the choir practices were fun.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V46	<input type="checkbox"/> 54





**SECTION B (cont.)      OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

8. Please read each of the statements below and answer them using the scale

- 1 = *msd*      I *most strongly disagree*  
 2 = *sd*        I *strongly disagree*  
 3 = *d*          I *slightly disagree*  
 4 = *a*          I *slightly agree*  
 5 = *sa*        I *strongly agree*  
 6 = *msa*       I *most strongly agree*

	Statement	msd	sd	d	a	sa	msa		
8.39	At times we share hardships and joys during practices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V47	<input type="text"/> 55
8.40	The commitment and effort that Absa has gone to through the choir project gives me a sense of worth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V48	<input type="text"/> 56
8.41	Singing with people from other departments broadens my perception of the function of my own department in relation to other departments in Absa.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V49	<input type="text"/> 57
8.42	Singing in the choir makes cultural differences less of an obstacle.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V50	<input type="text"/> 58
8.43	The fun nature of participating in our choir makes choir practicing a stress relieving activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V51	<input type="text"/> 59
8.44	I will encourage colleagues to participate in future Absa choir festivals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V52	<input type="text"/> 60
8.45	I feel happier at the end of choir practices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	V53	<input type="text"/> 61

**SECTION C      continues on the next page**



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**SECTION C: FURTHER QUESTIONS**

9. List in **order of priority** the **three most important obstacles** your choir encountered in the process of building your choir.


V54   62

V55   64

V56   66

10. List the **one greatest achievement** of your choir.

--

V57   68

11. Please indicate the **single greatest benefit** to you **personally** by participating in the choir festival.

--

V58   70

*Please return to the answer you supplied for Question 1 on page 2 above.*

12. If you have participated in the ABSA Choir Festival **before** (i.e. **after 2006**), how **many times** have you participated?

--

V59   72

**Thank you for your time and co-operation**



## **Appendix 2**

### **Index of Chapter 5 graphs and tables**

## Guide to graphs and tables in Chapter 5

*Figure no:*      *Graph/table depicting:*      *Page:*

---

### **Section A:**

<i>Figure 1:</i>	Number of times respondents have participated in the AICF	101
<i>Figure 2:</i>	AICF age profile	102
<i>Figure 3:</i>	AICF gender profile	103
<i>Figure 4:</i>	AICF ethnic profile	104
<i>Figure 5:</i>	AICF language profile	104
<i>Figure 6a:</i>	Post levels in Absa Bank	106
<i>Figure 6b:</i>	Post level profile of AICF participants	106

### **Section B:**

#### Factor 1:

<i>Figure 7:</i>	FUN per number of times participating in the AICF	110
<i>Figure 8:</i>	FUN per Absa region in South Africa	111
<i>Figure 9:</i>	FUN per AICF age profile	111
<i>Figure 10:</i>	FUN per AICF gender profile	112
<i>Figure 11:</i>	FUN per AICF ethnic profile	112
<i>Figure 12a:</i>	FUN per language groups 1-8	113
<i>Figure 12b:</i>	FUN per language groups 9-16	113
<i>Figure 13:</i>	FUN per post level employed at in Absa Bank	114
<i>Figure 14a:</i>	Summative ratings for FUN: I1-I3	115
<i>Figure 14b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of FUN summative ratings	115

#### Factor 2:

<i>Figure 15:</i>	PABSA per number of times participating in the AICF	116
<i>Figure 16:</i>	PABSA per Absa region in South Africa	117
<i>Figure 17:</i>	PABSA per AICF age profile	117
<i>Figure 18:</i>	PABSA per AICF gender profile	118

<i>Figure 19:</i>	PABSA per AICF ethnic profile	11 8
<i>Figure 20a:</i>	PABSA per language groups 1-9	119
<i>Figure 20b:</i>	PABSA per language groups 10-16	119
<i>Figure 21:</i>	PABSA per post level employed at in Absa Bank	120
<i>Figure 22a:</i>	Summative ratings for PABSA: I1-I3	121
<i>Figure 22b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of PABSA summative ratings	121
 <u>Factor 3:</u>		
<i>Figure 23:</i>	CDIV per number of times participating in the AICF	122
<i>Figure 24:</i>	CDIV per Absa region in South Africa	123
<i>Figure 25:</i>	CDIV per AICF age profile	123
<i>Figure 26:</i>	CDIV per AICF gender profile	124
<i>Figure 27:</i>	CDIV per AICF ethnic profile	1 24
<i>Figure 28a:</i>	CDIV per language groups 1-9	125
<i>Figure 28b:</i>	CDIV per language groups 10-16	125
<i>Figure 29:</i>	CDIV per post level employed at in Absa Bank	126
<i>Figure 30a:</i>	Summative ratings for CDIV: I1-I3	127
<i>Figure 30b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of CDIV summative ratings	127
 <u>Factor 4:</u>		
<i>Figure 31:</i>	TBUILD per number of times participating in the AICF	128
<i>Figure 32:</i>	TBUILD per Absa region in South Africa	129
<i>Figure 33:</i>	TBUILD per AICF age profile	129
<i>Figure 34:</i>	TBUILD per AICF gender profile	130
<i>Figure 35:</i>	TBUILD per AICF ethnic profile	130
<i>Figure 36a:</i>	TBUILD per language groups 1-9	131
<i>Figure 36b:</i>	TBUILD per language groups 10-16	131
<i>Figure 37:</i>	TBUILD per post level employed at in Absa Bank	132
<i>Figure 38a:</i>	Summative ratings for TBUILD: I1-I3	133
<i>Figure 38b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of TBUILD summative ratings	



Factor 5:

<i>Figure 39:</i>	CDEPT per number of times participating in the AICF	134
<i>Figure 40:</i>	CDEPT per Absa region in South Africa	135
<i>Figure 41:</i>	CDEPT per AICF age profile	135
<i>Figure 42:</i>	CDEPT per AICF gender profile	136
<i>Figure 43:</i>	CDEPT per AICF ethnic profile	136
<i>Figure 44a:</i>	CDEPT per 1 language groups 1-9	137
<i>Figure 44b:</i>	CDEPT per 1 language groups 10-16	137
<i>Figure 45:</i>	CDEPT per post level employed at in Absa Bank	138
<i>Figure 46a:</i>	Summative ratings for CDEPT: I1-I3	139
<i>Figure 46b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of CDEPT summative ratings	139

Factor 6:

<i>Figure 47:</i>	MIMPAS per number of times participating in the AICF	140
<i>Figure 48:</i>	MIMPAS per Absa region in South Africa	141
<i>Figure 49:</i>	MIMPAS per AICF age profile	141
<i>Figure 50:</i>	MIMPAS per AICF gender profile	142
<i>Figure 51:</i>	MIMPAS per AICF ethnic profile	142
<i>Figure 52a:</i>	MIMPAS per 1 language groups 1-9	143
<i>Figure 52b:</i>	MIMPAS per 1 language groups 10-16	143
<i>Figure 53:</i>	MIMPAS per post level employed at in Absa Bank	144
<i>Figure 54a:</i>	Summative ratings for MIMPAS: I1-I3	145
<i>Figure 54b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of MIMPAS summative ratings	145

Factor 1-6:

<i>Figure 55a:</i>	Summative data for Section B (factors 1-6)	146
<i>Figure 55b:</i>	Table of <i>mean</i> and <i>Standard Error</i> of Section B summative ratings	146



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### **Appendix 3**

## **Supplementary DVD**