

# Chapter 1

## Orientation and background

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The first democratic general elections in South Africa in 1994 set in motion arguably the most significant political and societal transformation in this country's history. A decade later the process of social and political transformation continues. A key reason for this rather slow pace of transformation in society is the fact that " ... most people were not psychologically prepared for the type or level of change required of them" (De Beer, 1998:2). Deep-seated values and beliefs, previously upheld by the political dispensation, would only change over time. Societal transformation depends on the commitment of people to the appreciation of human dignity of all, as opposed to the acceptance of racial segregation and biases.

Government has thus taken on the responsibility of speeding up the transformation of areas it believes will put South Africa back on the road of global competitiveness. One key area is the development of the country's human capital (cf. De Beer, 2003; Horwitz, Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll, 1996). Business was granted the opportunity to transform the employment environment voluntarily through, amongst other initiatives, Affirmative Action since 1994. This was the so-called bottom-up approach. The comprehensive transformation process envisaged, however, did not occur speedily (King Report II, 2002:114). As a result, government decided on the top-down approach to transforming the employment environment and promulgated several laws aimed at granting all citizens a fair opportunity to employment, protection from unfair labour practices and addressing the country's skills shortage.

Legislation aimed at achieving the aforementioned transformation include the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995, Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998, Skills Development Levies Act No. 9 of 1999, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act No.4 of 2000 and the Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000 (Du Plessis, Fouché & Van Wyk, 2002:viii-x). The most recent legislation is the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act No. 53 of 2003. The significance of this

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legislation was highlighted by President Thabo Mbeki in his State of the Nation address during May 2004.

The Employment Equity Act of 1998 (henceforth referred to as the EEA) has specific significance against the background of organisational transformation. Employment Equity, as the overarching vision, is the fair reflection of different categories of people in society in the workplace. This EEA describes measures through which organisations should speed up their transformational efforts. These measures are collectively known as Affirmative Action.

Reactions to and perceptions of Affirmative Action in the South African context are varied. These reactions are often categorised as emotionally charged and/or politically explosive. Many people fear the implications of Affirmative Action, specifically the impact thereof on their individual positions within the workplace. Those who feel threatened by these measures, tend to question the political and ethical legitimacy thereof. Those who stand to benefit from these measures often dislike the labelling associated with these measures. Confusion also exists in greater society about the relationship between the equal opportunity, black advancement, Affirmative Action and diversity management paradigms and related practices. As a result, Affirmative Action is often not correctly understood (De Beer & Radley, 2000:28-4; De Beer, 2003; and Visagie, 1999:148-162). The differences between these approaches, and strategies associated with each of these approaches, are described in Chapter 3.

The sources of conflicting reactions to Affirmative Action stem from individual, group and cultural beliefs and values which were both shaped by the political realities of the previous regime and the ideals people cherish for themselves in the current dispensation. Literature suggests that employees' understanding of Affirmative Action can only be effected through **transformational change management**. This approach to change is deemed as the most appropriate since the employees' mindsets and behaviour, as well as organisations' cultures (cf. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Gouillart & Kelly, 1995; Department of Labour, 1999a) need to be altered to accommodate a radically different paradigm from what they had previously been used to (De Beer, 2003; cf. Cummings & Worley, 2001).

The need for **continuous communication** in this transformational process is highlighted by previous and current research on, as well as legislative and theoretical frameworks for the implementation of

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Affirmative Action measures in South African organisations (cf. Blunt, 1997; Brynard & Van Rooyen, 1998:396-397; Department of Labour, 1999b; Human, 1996:46-64; Horwitz *et al.* 1996:140-142; Howard, Brits & Van Aarde, 1993:15-16; IDASA Report, 1995: 23-25, 44-46, 58-59 & 135-137; Mersham, Rensburg & Skinner, 1995:196-199; Mzaidume, in the press; Pillay, 1999; Seroka, 1999:179–181; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999:28-36; Van Sittert-Triebel, 1996: 280-286; Visagie, 1997:660-667 and 1999:148-162). However, as far as the researcher could establish by means of database searches and literature reviews in different sub-fields of study, very little research had been conducted to explore how organisations approach the **management of communication about Affirmative Action**.

## 1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The overarching question to be answered with this study can be formulated as: “How do South African organisations manage **communication about Affirmative Action** (within the Employment Equity context) during transformational change?” Since the emergence of so-called new approaches to change management, the usefulness of old-style thinking and strategies for this organisational context can be questioned.

Five interrelated sub-questions need to be addressed in the process of determining how South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action. The first question pertains to how organisations implement their “duty to inform and consult” with employees and reporting to government, as stipulated in Sections 16, 18, 21 and 25 of the EEA (Department of Labour, 1999b). The second, third and fourth questions respectively pertain to the approach to transformational change management, the approach to transformational change communication and the nature of transformational leadership within this context. The possible impact of the different approaches (and related implementation strategies) on the transformational effort would be the last question if this topic was to be researched in its full complexity.

Answers to these questions could provide organisations across a wide spectrum (sectors and organisational type) with insight regarding the different organisational factors that may either contribute to or hamper the Affirmative Action process. The **exploratory** nature and scope of this study excludes investigation of the fifth and last question – pursuing this question would require empirical evidence that would have to prove a causal relationship between chosen approaches or strategies and the effect

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on transformational efforts. Understanding the overarching research question, as well as the interrelated sub-questions, requires a more detailed description of the contextual realities within the South African situation. These are reactions to Affirmative Action; the legislative framework for Employment Equity; different approaches to transformational management and communication; the centrality of communication within transformation; existing South African frameworks for communicating Employment Equity; as well as transformational leadership in communicating Affirmative Action.

### 1.2.1 Reactions to Affirmative Action

De Beer and Radley (cf. 2000) contend that both designated and non-designated groups, as described in the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, have either covert negative sentiments toward Affirmative Action or view these measures with a fair amount of suspicion. Employees who are not part of the designated groups, as described in the EEA, most often fear the loss of existing jobs or potential development opportunities, while they also have racially charged stereotypical views about designated groups' labour specific competence (De Beer, 1998:5-6; Visagie, 1999:150-152). These views are often embedded in corporate cultures, which act as "hidden barriers" (Department of Labour, 1999b; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999:78).

People from non-designated groups often also don't understand the differences between the nature and purpose of the Equal Opportunity, Black Advancement, Affirmative Action and Diversity Management and related strategies (De Beer, 1998:1; De Beer & Radley, 2000:13-16 & 31-37 and Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999:78-79). Corporate goals pertaining to Affirmative Action are interpreted as purposefully ambiguous as a result of employees' level of uncertainty about their future status within organisations (De Beer & Radley, 2000:28 – 40; Puth, 2002:119 – 120).

Conversely, designated groups often don't agree with the specific approach to Affirmative Action followed in their organisations or even the label of being "Employment Equity candidates" since their personal goals don't necessarily depend on the corporate transformational goals. Individuals do not want to be seen as not being employed on merit. Arguments from the designated groups against so-called "tokenism" or "window-dressing" Affirmative Action and " ... setting individuals up for failure ... ", add to the depth of scepticism about and resistance to these measures (De Beer & Radley, 2000: 38-39).

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### 1.2.2 Perspectives on transformation change management and change communication

Theoretical descriptions of the management of change communication are broadly categorised as two groups, i.e. mechanistic (deterministic) or organic (non-determinant). The chaos and complexity theories/perspectives/approaches represent non-determinant thinking. These are also sometimes labelled as “emergent perspectives”. Mechanistic theories emphasise the need for control, predictability (including all components of communication strategies) and label change as a mere disruption – something that should be eliminated. Lewin’s three-stage model is perhaps the most well known “old style” description of change management (cf. Burnes, 2000), while chaos theory, complexity science and contingency theory represent organic thinking about the phenomenon (cf. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Lissack & Roos, 1999; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001; and Ströh, 1998).

Literature suggests that the new perspectives on change and transformation management and communication could lead to true (lasting) transformation of organisations and people, since the focus is on understanding change and transformation as well as on the people who are part of the transformational process. Misunderstanding either or both of these elements in organisational change and transformation is viewed as the fundamental reason for the high failure rate in change management initiatives (cf. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Cummings & Worley, 2001; Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003; Jick & Peiperl, 2003; Kallio, Saarinen & Tinnilä, 2002; Olson & Eoyang, 2001:187; Puth, 2002; and Wheatley, 1999:138-139).

Whereas mechanistic approaches emphasise specific models and theories that should be applied to organisations to effect change, organic approaches provide key concepts that are open to interpretation. These concepts are not meant to be prescriptive. The potential value of these approaches lie in the new philosophy toward understanding the true nature of information and how people, when allowed to self-organise, interact with information – the process through which they create meaning and learn to live with constant change. In organisational terms, this means a move away from rigid corporate strategies and resulting communication strategies or programmes to the creation of conditions that facilitate continuous organisational learning (cf. Cummings & Worley, 2001; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003; Fitzgerald & Eijnatten, 2002; Gayeski & Majka, 1996; Holtzhausen, 2000; Lissack & Roos, 1999; Murphy, 1996; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001; Ströh, 1998; Wheatley, 1994 & 1999).

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Organic perspectives on transformational management, however assert that transformational efforts often fail as a result of the old style conceptualisation of leadership and misinterpreting the needs and abilities of people who make up organisations (Wheatley, 1999:137-155). The assumption that people will only change or transform when told to do so by someone in a hierarchically higher position than themselves, is questioned. The chaos perspective specifically suggests that all employees are able to decide if, why and when they will change, i.e. if the required change or transformation is meaningful to them. From this perspective all employees are supposed to be self-directed leaders (cf. Keene, 2002; Johnson, 1995; and Wheatley, 1999).

The tension between the different perspectives on change and transformation, change communication and transformational leadership may leave many employees and organisations confused. Organisations therefore need to develop an appreciation for the new ways of thinking about leadership and the related communication or information needs employees may have. The possible implications of the key concepts of these theories, within this transformational context, are discussed in Chapter 2. The possible implications for change communication are explored in both Chapters 2 and 4.

### **1.2.3 The centrality of communication within transformation**

Three facts point to the pivotal role of communication in achieving specific organisational transformation objectives. The first is the emphasis on communication and consultation as part of the implementation and reporting process pertaining to Affirmative Action measures, as described in the Code of Good Practice for EE (Department of Labour, 1999b) for the EEA (55/1998). This code is further described in Chapters 3 and 4. The second is the need for communication (managed from both the organisational and corporate perspectives) as identified in previous research in South Africa (cf. IDASA Report, 1995; Seroka, 1999; and Van Sittert-Triebel, 1996).

The third is the notion of communication as a “powerful mechanism of change” in change management literature. Communication is thus the tool or vehicle through which understanding of the organisational context and need for transformation is facilitated (cf. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2003; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Barrett, 2002; Bechtel & Squires, 2001; Burnes, 2000; Carnall, 1999; Clampitt, DeKoch & Cashman, 2000; Cummings & Worley, 2002; Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003; Gouillart & Kelly, 1995; Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003; Keene, 2000; Lissack & Roos, 1999; Moran & Brightman, 2000; Murphy, 1996; Puth, 2002; Quirke, 1996; Spinks & Wells, 1995; Steyn & Puth,

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2000; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001; Ströh, 1998; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999; Van Sittert-Triebel, 1996; Wheatley, 1994 and 1999). Furthermore, De Beer (2003) contends that South African organisations that implement the philosophy and principles of Employment Equity, should aim to achieve tolerance, mutual respect and trust among all employees. Communication is the only vehicle through which these ideals can be achieved. Achieving this goal requires transformation of people on personal, group and organisational levels (De Beer, 2002:2; Department of Labour, 1999b; Horwitz *et al.*, 1996:141; Van Sittert-Triebel, 1996:274-280; and Visagie, 1997:660-667). The vehicle that will facilitate this transformation process is communication.

#### 1.2.4 Existing South African frameworks for communicating Affirmative Action

Tension seems to exist between the new perspectives on change and transformation and the traditional conceptualisation of organisations. The potential for a radically different understanding of the process of change and transformation is compared to traditional tools used to bring about either change or transformation. As was mentioned earlier, many change management failures have been ascribed to the failure to be flexible, e.g. to sticking only to a predetermined corporate strategy and predetermined communication strategies or programmes. The tension between the mechanistic and the organic perspectives on change management also holds true for managing communication about Affirmative Action. Literature about the implementation of Affirmative Action measures in the South African context highlights four frameworks that could be employed when developing a communication strategy for Affirmative Action.

The first such framework, by Wingrove (1993:83-117), focuses on the key components of the communication process, which can be categorised as dealing with the organisational purpose of Affirmative Action, content guidelines and guidelines for those directly responsible for the communication and implementation of these measures. The second framework, by Human (1993:53-70), focuses almost exclusively on broad guidelines for the managerial communication responsibilities and content of such a communication strategy or related programmes.

The third framework is provided by the Code of Good Practice for the Employment Equity Act (Department of Labour, 1999b) and refers to communication by employers during the planning, development, implementation and monitoring phases of Employment Equity Plans. During the development phase, consultation with role players should assist an organisation in the formulation of

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objectives, timeframes and communication thereof. The implementation and monitoring phases are viewed as ongoing and “should continue to include consultation, communication and awareness training” (Department of Labour, 1999b). This code also suggests specific mechanisms for internal communication (including representation of non-designated groups within communication forums), examples of consultation mechanisms and specific statistical information to be contained in the Employment Equity Plan. Finally, this code suggests that information about such a plan should be “easily accessible to all levels of employees” (Department of Labour, 1999b).

However, the fourth framework, by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999:28–35), suggests that a comprehensive strategy for the communication of Affirmative Action should be developed prior to an organisation embarking on this transformational path, both from a business strategy and a communication strategy perspective. Thomas and Robertshaw's (cf. 1999) strategy consists of four phases. During the first and most strategic level the strategy should help to position the organisation by means of communication. The second phase should facilitate management consensus about and commitment to the process by means of communication. Communication with different employee representatives is the focus of the third phase. The fourth and final phase focuses on ongoing communication with employees and is based on the steps of a communication programme (Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999:28-35).

Both the Thomas and Robertshaw's (cf. 1999) framework and the Code of Good Practice for the EEA (Department of Labour 1999b) emphasise the recognition of this type of organisational transformation as a continuous process; the strategic identification of stakeholders; the importance of change leaders and the creation of a climate of open communication; trust and continuous feedback; the two-way symmetrical (balanced) worldview and new possibilities for transformational management as collectively described by Anderson & Ackerman Anderson (2001:173-174), Barrett (2002:221-227), Bechtel & Squires (2001:250-253), Carnall (1999:128-129), Clampitt *et al.* (2000:41-50) Deatherage & Hazleton (1998:58-59), Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003:43), Grunig (1992), Grobler (in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:201-202), Godard & Lenhardt (1999:84), Kallio *et al.* (2002:80-84), Keene (2000:17), Lissack & Roos (1999:226-227), Moran & Brightman (2000:74), Olson & Eoyang (2001:184), Spinks & Wells (cf. 1995), Steyn & Puth (2000:64-65), Ströh (1998:29) and Puth (2002:131).

Grunig and White (in Grunig, 1992:43-44) postulate that the two-way symmetrical worldview hinges on the presuppositions of interdependence, open systems, moving equilibrium, equity, autonomy,

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innovation, decentralisation of management, responsibility within society and interest group liberalisation. In short, balance between an organisation's goals and those of other entities it encounters, is sought. Since Thomas and Robertshaw (cf. 1999) suggest that communication about Affirmative Action ought to facilitate understanding and acceptance, their framework could be viewed as a benchmark for South African organisations. Designated employers also have to adhere to minimum communication requirements stipulated in the EEA and the accompanying code regarding the preparation, implementation and monitoring phases of Employment Equity (Department of Labour, 1999a). A more in-depth discussion of the aforementioned existing frameworks for an Employment Equity or Affirmative Action communication strategy appears in Chapter 4.

### 1.2.5 Transformational leadership in communicating Affirmative Action

The tension between mechanistic and organic approaches to change management extends to the concept of leadership since transformational leaders are central to the management of communication: transformational leaders need to be "communicating leaders" (cf. Puth, 2002).

The research problem points to organisations that still approach change or transformational leadership from a deterministic perspective. This perspective supposes that leadership is a "doing" role. Burnes (2000:489-496) describes three focal areas within this perspective, i.e. the personal characteristics of leadership, the leader-follower situation and the leadership style within the context of the overall organisation context and climate.

The "doing" perspective seems to govern the thinking of both human resources management experts and designated individuals in organisations that implement Affirmative Action. These designated positions, CEO's, Employment Equity managers, Transformation managers, Diversity managers, Human Resources managers and line managers are traditionally called on as leaders when Employment Equity policies and related strategies need to be implemented. The rationale is that the commitment of these office bearers to the transformational effort, is symbolically significant to all stakeholders since they are directly responsible for the strategic and tactical implementation of the Employment Equity strategy (cf. De Beer, 1998; De Beer, 2003; De Beer & Radley, 2000; Human, 1993; IDASA Report; 1995; and Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999). The Code of Good Practice for the EEA (Department of Labour, 1999b) also suggests that senior management should be responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of the Employment Equity plan.

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The potential role of the Corporate Communication Management department in the Employment Equity strategy seems to be poorly described in traditional Human Resource Management literature or the legislative framework. It appears as if communication for the implementation of Affirmative Action is not conceptualised as resorting under one specific department. Corporate Communication theory, however, suggests that the most senior communication practitioner would have to play the strategist role in this context (cf. Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Traditionally the organisational expert on communication facilitation and/or solving organisational problems together with management (Dozier in Grunig, 1992:330), such an individual is also viewed as instrumental in change (and by implication different transformational processes). The normative role conceptualisation for the corporate communication strategist (cf. Steyn, 2002) emphasises the need for continuous environmental scanning which should result in the adjustment of corporate and communication strategies (Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:203-204; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:205; and Likely, 2002:26-29).

As was mentioned previously, in an attempt to make the new possibilities accepted by the organic theories more concrete for today's transformational leaders, Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2001:187-191) describe leadership as both a process of "knowing, doing and being" and suggest seven core competencies these leaders should have. Their description is not prescriptive in the sense that leaders can follow a checklist, but suggests the practical integration of key concepts associated with chaos and complexity theories into the dimensions of "knowing, doing and being".

### **1.2.6 Employment Equity legislative framework**

As was indicated previously, the process of Employment Equity is formalised by legislation, but also supported by several guideline documents. According to both the EEA and Code for Good Practice for the EEA (Department of Labour, 1999b). These guidelines are supposed to ensure that the process is implemented in a manner that will ensure legal compliance as a minimum outcome. The usefulness of such guidelines is also highlighted by the fact that organisations had previously made many mistakes while attempting to achieve representation of non-whites in the workforce. Both mistakes and details regarding the most recent approach to this socio-economic process are discussed in Chapter 3.

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### 1.3 META-THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Stating the research question in relation to possible sources for solutions, clarifies the theoretical and empirical logic of this study. The nature of the research problem necessitates a brief explanation of the interrelatedness of the domains within which this study resorts, as well as the different theories that govern the study. Key concepts are also described in order to ensure the correct interpretation thereof within this study. These aspects are summarised in Table 1.1 on the next page and discussed thereafter.

#### 1.3.1 Postmodernism as worldview

Postmodernism is the worldview that governs this study. Holtzhausen (2000:95-99) and Powell (1998:17) contend that postmodernism, as a worldview, is not easily defined since there is little agreement (and many misunderstandings) on/about the matter. This worldview is more easily defined when opposed to modernism. Whereas modernism was governed by distinct meta-narratives, postmodernism allows for multiple interpretations of phenomena: all views are equal. The most important difference that would be applicable to a study within the domain of transformational change management is the radical move away from the modern concepts of design, hierarchy and centering.

From the postmodern worldview, these concepts are replaced by chance, anarchy and dispersal respectively (Powell, 1998:17). Holtzhausen (2000:95) also contends that communication management<sup>1</sup> (public relations) faces new societal and organisational challenges from a postmodern perspective: "Coordinating pluralism will be the public relations role". The inclusion and facilitation of diverse values and conflict will be at the centre of this function as opposed to pure persuasion, alignment and stability.

Postmodern thinkers argue that the aspects mentioned previously would become more prominent since society at large is a vortex of moving people, values and interests that makes organisational survival a challenging and dynamic process. The postmodern understanding of order, transformation, information, communication and public relations will be further explored in Chapters 2 and 4. Finally, Babbie and Mouton (2001:39-54) also describe postmodernism as a research tradition that opposes

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<sup>1</sup> Following Grunig's (1992:4) conceptualisation, the terms public relations and communication management could be used interchangeably. But communication management is preferred within this study.

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Table 1.1

## Meta-theoretical and conceptual framework

<b>Research question</b>	How do South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action (within the context of Employment Equity) during transformational change management?			
<b>Domains and theories</b>				
<b>Worldview</b>	Postmodernism			
<b>Paradigms</b>	1. Two-way symmetry 2. Human capital development 3. Emergent perspectives on change, transformation and change communication			
<b>Domains</b>	Human Resources Management	Corporate Communication Management		Management Science
<b>Sub-fields within domains</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Psychology <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Communication Management <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder Management <input type="checkbox"/> Management Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Intercultural Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Management <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Development <input type="checkbox"/> Change Management <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Development	
<b>Theories from respective sub-domains</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The Management of Diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Employment Equity Act (1998) <input type="checkbox"/> Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003)	<input type="checkbox"/> General Theory for Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management <input type="checkbox"/> Communication Process <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder Theory <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Communication Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Two-way symmetrical model for Communication Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Chaos Theory <input type="checkbox"/> Scenario Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Management	
<b>Major concept</b>	Affirmative Action Communication			
<b>Key terms</b>	Transformational change	Transformational change communication	Affirmative Action	Transformational leadership
<b>Empirical methods</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate strategy (document) analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate strategy (document) analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate strategy (document) analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate strategy (document) analysis
<b>Measurement items</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Interview question <input type="checkbox"/> Entire strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Interview questions <input type="checkbox"/> Entire strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Interview question <input type="checkbox"/> Entire strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Interview questions <input type="checkbox"/> Entire strategy

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the notions of modernist objectivity. Multiple interpretations of evidence pertaining to research phenomena also typify postmodernist research. Postmodernism thus affects the research methodology.

### 1.3.2 Paradigms

Three paradigms govern this study, i.e. two-way symmetry (Grunig and White in Grunig, 1992:43-44), human capital development (cf. De Beer, 1998; De Beer & Radley, 2000) and the emergent perspectives on transformational change and communication (cf. Lissack & Roos, 1999; Murphy, 1996; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001; Ströh, 1998; and Wheatley, 1994). The influence of these paradigms on the purpose of Affirmative Action, communication and consultation will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

### 1.3.3 Domains, sub-fields and specific theories

Although the research problem could be interpreted as a Human Resource Management problem *per se*, the essence of the research question falls within the domain of Corporate Communication Management since the responsibility of communicating transformational change resides with the organisation and normatively requires a planned effort by the corporate communication management department/division, i.e. a corporate communication strategy and related programmes (Steyn & Puth, 2000:51- 95). Grunig (1992:4) further defines corporate communication as equal to public relations and as the process of communication between an organisation and its publics:

“Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organisation’s communication with both internal and external publics – groups that affect the ability of the organisation to meet its goals.”

Dimensions such as the importance of internal and external stakeholders, the nature of the communication strategy and the measurement of the transformational management effort within the context of the research objectives, all correlate with the aforementioned description, which leaves no doubt about the domain of this study. Further categorisation of the study against the background of either strategic communication management or change management is not necessary since both of these are regarded as sub-fields of study within Corporate Communication Management and Management Science respectively. Theories to be explored in Chapters 2 to 4 range from theoretical

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assumptions about Affirmative Action in the South African context, the management of stakeholders, the communication process, formulation of a corporate communication strategy, leadership and organisational development through transformation.

### 1.3.4 Major concept

The major concept is derived from the research question and is thus defined as “Affirmative Action communication” – the contextual application of “transformational change communication”. This concept consists of content and audience dimensions. This term is meant for a broad, general understanding. This concept is further explored in Chapters 2 and 4.

## 1.4 KEY TERMS

Four key terms need clarification within the context of this study, i.e. transformational change management, transformational change communication, Affirmative Action and transformational leadership. These terms are further explored in Chapters 2 to 4.

### 1.4.1 Transformational change

Transformational change is a specific category within the realm of change management. Transformation is driven by change. It does not focus on incremental, process-driven adjustments, but the modification of behaviour based on the internalisation of changes by people (Cummings & Worley: 2001:498). In organisational terms transformation requires “profound change” (Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:191). These modifications also affect corporate culture profoundly.

Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2001:39 – 40 & 50) describe transformational change as the type of adjustment organisations need to undergo in order to arrive at a “... completely new way the organisation and its people see the world, their customers, their work and themselves”. This process requires “... significant changes to organisations’ cultures, people’s behaviour and mindsets”. Gouillart and Kelly (1995:6) refer to these organisational dimensions as the “... spiritual essence of the organisational system”.

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Transformation should thus not be equated with situational changes brought about by rearranging or restructuring the physical dimensions of organisations (cf. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003; Jick & Peiperl, 2003; Schaafsma, 1997; Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001; and Wheatley, 1999).

The type of change required of individuals and groups in accepting Affirmative Action measures in South African organisations, can be described as both “profound” and of a continuous nature. These qualities confirm the view that the implementation of Affirmative Action measures, as part of the EEA, is transformational, rather than incidental or short-term, or only structurally driven. The relationship between the concepts of change, transition and transformation is further discussed in Chapter 2.

#### 1.4.2 Transformational change communication

Communication is seen as the vehicle through which meaning is shared between people in any context. Communication could be managed by organisations from either an organisational communication perspective (Conrad & Poole, 2002:3-5) or corporate communication perspective (Steyn & Puth, 2000:3). These classifications are not mutually exclusive within the context of transformational change management.

The organisational communication approach emphasises different internal dynamics of organisations that may enhance or impede efforts to get messages across to internal stakeholders. The corporate communication approach presupposes that communication is managed on behalf of an entire organisation and emphasises an organisation’s ability to negotiate both internal and external dynamics in its communication efforts with internal and external stakeholders (Grunig, 1992:4).

The purpose of communication also forms part of the understanding of communication at either organisational or corporate levels. Thayer (quoted in Grunig, 1992:287) differentiates between synchronic and diachronic communication. Synchronic communication aims to synchronise the behaviour of publics with that of the organisation – the organisation can thus continue without interference. Diachronic communication aims to negotiate “ ... a state of affairs that benefits both the organisation and publics ... ” (Grunig, 1992:287).

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According to the same author these two concepts are reflected in asymmetrical and symmetrical approaches to communication management. The normative conceptualisation of the two-way symmetrical model for communication and its potential for transformational change communication, are further described in Chapter 2 and applied in Chapter 4.

### 1.4.3 Affirmative Action

As was indicated under section 1.1, a collection of specific measures employers should implement to achieve Employment Equity, are referred to as Affirmative Action. It is important to note that the term Affirmative Action should not be used interchangeably with Employment Equity, since the latter refers to the ultimate vision for the South African employment environment. Neither should it be confused with Black Advancement, Black Economic Empowerment or Diversity Management, since these are all historical eras which are associated with the development of South Africa's human capital.

The goal of Affirmative Action in South Africa is to ensure that designated groups (Black/African, Coloured, Indian), women and people with disabilities are represented equitably in all work categories and levels of the workforce. No preferential ranking of these categories is provided in the Act (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2002:80; King Report I, 1994:24; Thomas & Robertshaw, 1999:143; and Visagie, 1999:150-151). The relationship between the terms Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and diversity management is further discussed in Chapter 3.

### 1.4.4 Transformational leadership

Conceptualising transformational change has an impact on the conceptualisation of transformational leadership within the context of this study. According to Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2001:5) and Cummings and Worley (2001:500-501) transformational leadership cannot be separated from the organisation's perspective on transformation. Therefore, if transformation is viewed as a process that starts with people at individual level, those employed as transformational leaders should also transform themselves. The transformational leader should thus be fully aware of his/her internal reality or orientation within a given organisational context (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001:5). Transformational leaders have to model the desired new values or attitudes.



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The same authors also refer to transformational leadership as encompassing both the dimensions of “being, knowing and doing” - an integrated approach which is driven by the key concepts associated with the emergent approaches to change and communication (chaos and complexity), i.e. the ability to live with varying degrees of uncertainty and ambiguity vs. certainty and stability as well as the ability to help other employees realise their potential for self-directedness and creativity.

Finally, and most importantly within the context of the current research, Burnes (cf. 2000), Moss Kanter (quoted in Jick & Peiperl, 2003:430 – 431), Ströh (1998:37-38) and Wheatley (1999:145) agree that communication, as the vehicle through which meaning is shared, is central to the enactment of leadership roles. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson’s (2001:181-187) conceptualisation of change leadership confirms the presupposition that communication will be the vehicle through which appointed or informal leaders will facilitate organisational transformation. A more in-depth discussion of transformational leadership appears in Chapter 2, while Chapter 4 focuses on specific communication responsibilities of various traditional leaders during the implementation of the EEA.

#### 1.4.5 Empirical methods and measurement items

The manner in which each of the key terms contributed to the empirical investigation of the research goal and objectives, are described in the three theoretical chapters, as well as Chapter 5.

### 1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

#### 1.5.1 General aim

To explore how a selection of three South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action (within the context of Employment Equity) during transformational change.

#### 1.5.2 Objectives

##### □ Objective 1

To develop a conceptual framework for the management of communication about Employment Equity as a transformational change phenomenon in the South African context.

□ **Objective 2**

To describe the purpose of Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.

□ **Objective 3**

To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners within each of the three South African organisations about the strategic value of communication in the management of Affirmative Action.

□ **Objective 4**

To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners about the strategic value of communication in the management of Affirmative Action across three South African organisations.

□ **Objective 5**

To identify the key role players (both departments and designated individuals) responsible for managing communication about Affirmative Action in three South African organisations.

□ **Objective 6**

To identify key responsibilities of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners in managing communication about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.

□ **Objective 7**

To compare the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners about the specific contribution of the corporate communication function in managing communication about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.

□ **Objective 8**

To identify communication management responsibilities of departmental leaders, other than the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, in managing communicating about Affirmative Action in each of the three South African organisations.

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□ **Objective 9**

To identify what each of the three South African organisations, represented by the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, regard as the most important content about Affirmative Action that is communicated to internal stakeholders.

□ **Objective 10**

To identify what each of the three South African organisations, represented by the views of the most senior Communication, Human Resources and Employment Equity practitioners, regard as the most important content about Affirmative Action that is communicated to external stakeholders.

□ **Objective 11**

To describe, by means of qualitative content analysis of corporate communication strategy documents, which content components of Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework for an Employment Equity communication strategy, each of the three South African organisations communicate to various stakeholders.

□ **Objective 12**

To provide a general comparison of how three South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action by means of a comparative case study analysis along the inherent dimensions of Objectives 2-11.

### **1.5.3 Towards a holistic understanding of the major concept**

As was indicated previously, the overarching research question is very broad (holistic). The relationship between the overarching research question, four sub-questions and 12 objectives are best illustrated by means of a table (table 1.2) on the next page.

Since the sub-questions encompass a multitude of dimensions, objectives overlap in some instances. The same principle also applies to the measurement of key terms since these all contribute the holistic understanding of the major concept. The theoretical chapters are aimed at describing some (normative) dimensions of the major concept, while empirical evidence will contribute to the completion of the conceptualisation of an answer to the overarching research question. Such a conceptualisation is presented in Chapter 7.

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Table 1.2

## Objectives in relation to research question and sub-questions

Question(s)	Objective(s)
<b>Overarching question:</b> How do South African organisations manage communication about Affirmative Action (within the context of Employment Equity)?	12
<b>Sub-question 1:</b> How do South African organisations comply with their duty to consult with and inform stakeholders about the process of Employment Equity?	2, 7, 9, 10 and 11
<b>Sub-question 2:</b> What approach do South African organisations follow in the management of Employment Equity as a transformational change process?	2 and 6
<b>Sub-question 3:</b> What approach do South African organisations follow in the management of communication about Employment Equity as a transformational change process?	3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11
<b>Sub-question 4:</b> What approach do South African organisations follow regarding leadership within the process of managing Employment Equity as a transformational process?	5, 6, 7, 8 and 11

## 1.6 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Communication problems, in the broadest understanding of the word, is one of the recurring themes in previous and current research about the implementation of Affirmative Action, as part of the EEA (IDASA Report, 1995:135-137; Mwafongo, 1997; Mzaidume, in the press; Pillay, 1999; Seroka, 1999:178-181; Siddo, in the press; cf. Snyman, 1997; Van Sittert-Triebel, 1996: 280-286; Visagie, 1997:660-667 & 1999:148-162).

As far as the researcher could establish by means of a National Research Foundation projects database search, this study is the first to focus specifically on the **management of communication about Affirmative Action** (within the context of Employment Equity) in South African. The title of this study reflects the focus on exploring how organisations address this phenomenon, i.e. "Communicating Affirmative Action during transformational change: A South African case study perspective".

Although exploratory in nature, the research results may lead to a better understanding of problem areas and solutions for organisations from different sectors (private, parastatal or government) with the specific focus on communication. The emphasis on contextual detail per case study could provide specific insight to organisations in similar sectors. Furthermore, specific themes in areas related to corporate communication, transformational change management, transformational leadership, and the importance of the BEEA (53/2003) have been identified for future research. These are discussed in Chapter 7.

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## 1.7 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

An **exploratory**, qualitative research approach was followed within this study. The nature of the research problem was the deciding factor in adopting this approach. Anderson (1987:244-245), Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) and Murphy (1995:1) describe qualitative research as the appropriate approach when the objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, in this case the process of communication about Affirmative Action in South African organisations as part of organisational transformation.

A multiple case study design was followed in which each case study represented an organisation. Three organisations were included in the main investigation of the study, while a fourth organisation served as the pilot study. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), this research design is " ... especially useful where phenomena and relationships are studied that have heuristic value in terms of identifying issues to take note of in future research".

Two sources of evidence were used in each case study, i.e. partially structured personal interviews and corporate strategy documents. As is indicated at the bottom of Table 1.1 (refer to section 1.3), the items for the interviews can be directly related to the four key terms (refer to section 1.4). After analysis of each case study, the different case studies were compared to arrive at the results and conclusions of this study. A description of the methodology, results and recommendations appear in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

## 1.8 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

Although the title of the study may at first glance create the impression that it resorts within the domain of Human Resource Management, the research problem and phenomenon resort within the domain of Corporate Communication Management.

The exploratory purpose of this study allows for empirical investigation of the main question about how South African organisations manage **communication about Affirmative Action**, including sub-questions pertaining to the approach to communication, transformation and leadership. The causal relationship between the chosen approach to either of these three elements and the ultimate

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effectiveness of the implementation of Affirmative Action measures, as transformational change (the fifth and last sub-question as described in section 1.2), is excluded from this study.

This study is exploratory in nature and therefore does not accommodate the aforementioned sub-question. Furthermore, no attempt is made to formulate propositions or test hypotheses. Since the study focuses only on South African organisations, the results and recommendations may not be generalised to a wider context.

## 1.9 DEMARCATION OF CHAPTERS

This study comprises seven chapters, including this one. Chapters 2 to 4 cover the theoretical background and exploration of the research question, each focusing on one or a combination of the terms described as key terms in section 1.4. These are transformational change management, Affirmative Action in South Africa and frameworks for the management of communication about Affirmative Action in South Africa.

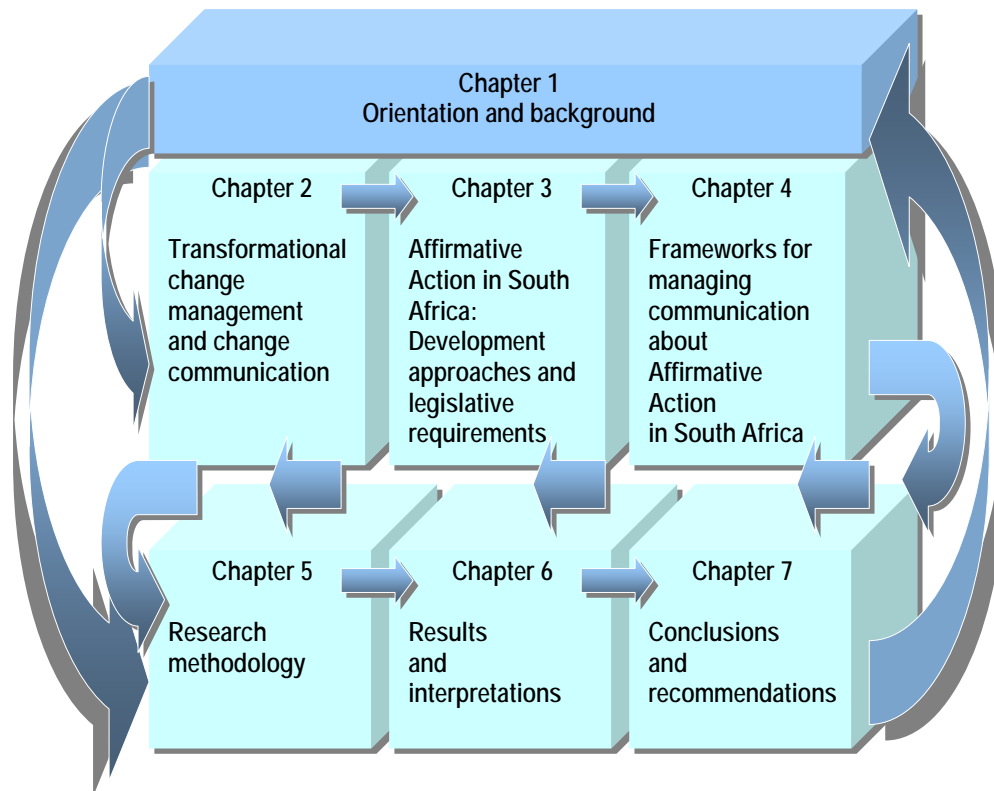
Transformational change communication and transformational leadership are central themes in this study and thus appear in all the theoretical chapters. The last three chapters deal with the research methodology, reporting and interpretation of results, and conclusions respectively. The last two chapters also rely on the comparison of theory with the empirical evidence. The structure of this study is visually represented by figure 1.1 (on the next page). Appropriate elements from this figure appear at the beginning of each chapter.

### □ Chapter 2

This chapter focuses on the description of transformational change as a phenomenon. Chaos theory and complexity science are described as the new perspectives on change and transformation that encompass the underlying principles of the organic worldview. Reasons for favouring the “chaos perspective” throughout the study, are also discussed. This emergent perspective in change and transformation also define the place of the individual and leadership in corporate transformation and change communication. The emphasis in this chapter is on the need to move away from deterministic models for understanding and managing transformation in order to integrate organic thinking into the process: the management of transformation is conceptualised as a “thinking science”.

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Figure 1.1  
Structure of study



### □ Chapter 3

Since the transformational context of this study is the implementation of the EEA, the development and definition thereof need clarification. This chapter provides both a historical overview of the human capital development approaches and details from the EEA. Reasons for common misunderstandings about the intentions and requirements of the law are apparent from these descriptions. Arguments in favour of managing diversity vs. race-based Affirmative Action are considered since the first of these two approaches will arguably lead to lasting societal and organisational transformation. Finally, a number of challenges organisations face during the implementation of the EEA, are highlighted.

### □ Chapter 4

An attempt is made to bridge the traditional divide between the abstract concepts from the chaos perspective and practical organisational problems in this chapter. Several, both old and recent, frameworks for the management of communication about EE matters were compared in search of

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solutions to the current research question. Four of these are briefly evaluated. Two recent frameworks that provide guidance in terms of legal requirements (compliance) and a corporate strategy are then presented, i.e. the Code of Good Practice for the EEA (Department of Labour, 1999b) and a model for integrated thinking by Thomas and Robertshaw (1999). Thomas and Robertshaw's framework is favoured for its emphasis on the strategic positioning of the organisation, description of responsibilities for transformational leaders and the consultative (symmetrical) mode for change communication. Since all of the aforementioned frameworks have shortcomings, a conceptual framework is proposed for managing communication about EE matters. The conceptual framework is based on the notion of bridging the divide between traditional models for aligning corporate strategies with communication strategies and the chaos perspective on transformational change management. The underlying purpose of this framework is to facilitate continuous corporate transformation and learning.

#### □ Chapter 5

This chapter describes the reasoning for conducting the empirical investigation from a purely qualitative perspective. Details regarding the research design and specific methods (techniques) are also presented in this chapter. As was indicated previously, a multiple case study design was followed that included one organisation in the extensive pilot study and three organisations in the main investigation. Partially structured personal interviews were conducted with three key transformational leaders in this context, while the communication strategies for this context was compared to Thomas and Robertshaw's (1999) framework in an attempt to summarise how organisations are currently managing communication about Employment Equity matters.

#### □ Chapter 6

This chapter is devoted to the reporting and interpretation of evidence in relation to each of the research objectives as formulated in section 1.5.2. The reduction and presentation of voluminous qualitative evidence in an appropriate format lies at the core of this chapter. Evidence and initial interpretations are presented per case study, while the comparison across the three cases and specific objectives form the second half of the chapter. The inferences from the comparison across cases form the basis for the conclusions and recommendations that are presented in Chapter 7.



## □ Chapter 7

The last chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations about the research phenomenon. These conclusions are presented in relation to the main research question and the four sub-questions, as formulated in section 1.2. Finally, recommendations for further are presented as a result of the synthesis of conclusions and observations about the research process.