

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa in 1992 is on the brink of change - politically, economically and socially. Apartheid as a socio-economic system, was based on the tenets that peoples of different cultures acted differently and had different value systems. Seperate development was therefore seen as the obvious solution in such diversity.

Three major developments contributed to the demise of Apartheid. Firstly, it was seen as an unjust and discriminating system. Secondly, the United States of America was involved in the fostering of the ideal of a New World Order, calling for greater integration of human potential. Thirdly, Western Europe and more recently the countries of the old Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, were moving towards a united Europe. The survival of South Africa as a modern industrial complex in the era of increased integration will depend to a large extent on the ability of its peoples who think differently and have different values and beliefs to strive towards the attainment of common goals. South Africans of different races and cultures grapple with hopes and fears which are all bound up in needs as fundamental as food and housing and as complex as the interlocking symptoms of civilization, of poverty, unemployment, education and development, automation, productivity and a common South-African citizenship. These problems however, can only be solved if the different races have a deep understanding of each other.

The development of people-to-people linkages irrespective of national differences, can and may ameliorate national tensions and inequities.

1.2 DIVERSITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Cultural collaborations in heterogeneous communities presuppose some understanding of where others' thinking differs from one's own. Understanding the way in which nationality and culture predisposes people's own thinking, is therefore a necessity for a better understanding of invisible cultural differences.

Culture may be defined as a transmitted and created content and as patterns of values, ideas and other symbolic meaningful systems that serve as factors in the shaping of human behaviour and the artifacts produced through behaviour (Kroeber and Parsons, 1958, p 583). Onyemelukwe (1973, p 5) asserts that differences in culture make for dissimilar adaptations to industrialization. He continues by saying that Africa is the one region where man and his culture have been ignored and regarded as totally irrelevant in a modern context. In addition to these problems the African worker has to cope with the heavy psychological burden of being forced to deal with a technology which is mainly developed in an alien culture.

One basic characteristic of the complex South African society is multi-culturalism. The term implies that people from more than one culture have to interact (Adler, 1986, p 7). Applied to organizational settings, it implies that people from different cultures interact in work roles. Culture thus influences the values and behaviour patterns of members of organizations. At the core of this rich cultural diversity is a complex array of human values. Rokeach (1973, p 26) states that it is difficult to conceive of a human problem that would not be better illuminated if reliable value data concerning it, were available.

Differences between cultures, social classes, occupations, religions or political orientations are all translatable into questions concerning differences in the individual's underlying values and value systems. Values according to Sargent and Williamson (1966, p 261) are kinds of motives. They are closely related to attitudes since they represent orientation to or striving towards given goals.

1.3 VALUES AND VALUE SYSTEMS

Hofstede (1980) accommodates values and value systems under four broad dimensions which provide maximum differentiation between national cultures: Power Distance, Individuality, Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity.

The term Power Distance is taken from the work of Mulder (1977) who defines Power as "the potential to determine or direct the behaviour of another person more so than the other way round". Mulder sees Power Distance as "the degree of inequality in power between a less powerful individual and a more powerful other". According to Hofstede (1980a, p 120), Power Distance is a norm which deals with the desirability and undesirability of inequality and of dependence versus interdependence in society. Values about inequality are coupled with values about the exercise of power and is likely to affect the organizational structure. Co-determination and worker participation have been assumed to reduce the power distribution in organizations and have been regarded as a form of power equalization (Mc Allister, 1982, p 9). Gasse (in Hofstede, 1980a, p 99) argues that each culture justifies authority by emphasising its major values. He pictured a continuum of which the two poles are

monolithism and pluralism. The latter implies a culture with a small power distance. In such a culture competition between leaders and groups is encouraged and democratic politics are fostered. Pluralist approaches or scenarios would be to make greater statutory provision for worker involvement in decision-making ranging from quality circles through to job enrichment type of initiatives, through to work councils and to worker participation on boards of directors. Adelman and Morris (1967) suggest that variables such as the strength of the labour movement, wage differentials and the centralization of power are related to Power Distance.

A second dimension is Individualism. Beteille (1977, p 162) stresses the relationship between political democracy, capitalism, competition and individualism. The capitalistic market economy fosters individualism whereas the various socialist types of economic order foster collectivism. Hofstede (1980a) postulates that the reason why Belgium and France continue to respect certain rules of political pluralism in spite of strong authoritarian elements in their national value systems, is mainly due to individualism. In South Africa there are indications that the increasing frustration of individual goals by political restrictions leads to a gradual redefining of the psychological future in which attempts at personal planning are progressively replaced by concern for the collective fate of one's group (Danziger, 1963, p 36). Collectivism does not imply a negation of the individual's well-being. It only means the maintenance of the group's well-being as the best guarantee of the individual's future. Collaboration rather than competition in the African culture makes more available to all. A collectivist value system calls for greater emotional dependence of members on their organizations. The organization

assumes a broad responsibility for its members.

Individualism is thus opposed to humaneness or communalism. There is also an association between the degree of collectivism/individualism in a society and its degree of modernity and level of economic development. Technologies developed in Western individualistic settings presuppose an individualistic mentality which is part of modernity (Triandis, 1973, p 166).

The dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance relates to uncertainty about the future, a basic fact with which human beings try to cope and the consequent need to protect society. Ways of coping with uncertainty belong to the cultural heritage of societies and are transformed and reinforced through basic institutions such as the family, school and state. The way in which organizations deal with uncertainty is reflected in collectively held values. Downey, Hellriegel and Slocum (1977) have shown that perceptions of uncertainty relate to personality variables. Therefore the perceptions of uncertainty are also affected by cultural variables. This implies that different societies deal with uncertainty in different ways. This should affect the way in which organizational policy reacts to uncertainty. A strong achievement motive indicates a low uncertainty and thus a willingness to take risks. Hofstede (1980a, p 172) also finds that a strong preference for group decisions and consultative management discloses risk avoidance for the individual decision maker. Research done by Fridrich (in Hofstede, 1980a, p 174) shows the cultural difference between Germans and Americans in Uncertainty Avoidance. The Germans stress, more than the

Americans, employment security, economic performance and stability in their society.

The Masculine value system is associated with high stress levels and individual decision-making rather than group decision-making and also with a preference for large corporations which have a right to intervene in the lives of their employees. Vroom (1964, p 43) quotes research findings of a positive correlation between job satisfaction and masculinity. The masculine value system is also related to religion. Data shows that the Catholic culture tends to be more masculine than a Protestant culture (Hofstede, 1980a, p 293). This masculine value system does not refer in a simple way to fundamental personality traits but to learned styles of interpersonal interaction. Masculinity could be seen as a social-ego factor. If job performance is central to the worker, the performance is ego-involved. Allport (1946) describes ego-involvement as the situation in which the person engages in the "status seeking motive" of his work. Hofstede (1980a) says that cultures differ along a social-ego dimension.

1.4 LOCUS OF CONTROL

Also important for an explanation of human behaviour in social and organizational settings is the concept of locus of control. People may attribute the cause of events either to themselves or on the external environment and the influence of powerful persons in positions of authority. Those who consider their own personalities as the causal factor of events in their lives are said to be internality inclined or to have an internal locus of control. People who are externally inclined or have an external locus of control consider

outside forces (including powerful persons) to be in control of their lives.

Hofstede's four value dimensions and the concept of locus of control have implications for a changing South Africa.

1.5 INTERPERSONAL GOALS VERSUS ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Work goals are opposed to interpersonal relation goals. Research done by Dubin (1956) on work centrality shows that the central life interests of United States workers are job satisfaction, work performance and self-esteem. Work centrality is related to the concept of job involvement. Lodahl and Kijner (1965) defines job involvement as the degree to which a person psychologically identifies with his work. Job involvement is thus the degree in which performance affects self-esteem. Its main determinant is a value orientation towards work which is learned early in the socialization process.

To effect improvements in the labour, economic, racial and social relations field and to cope successfully and creatively with such change, South Africans belonging to the different cultures in this multi-cultural society, need to become aware of the feelings, attitudes and values of one another. As increased interaction takes place between the different cultures with their different value systems in a common work environment, the opportunity for South African organizations to bring about major cultural transferences and transpositions which could contribute towards a new cultural synthesis, increases. The changes should however retain from the original value systems of the different cultures those elements that

are essential. It implies the development of an approach to labour which incorporates different cultures into single organizations. Thus potential cultural conflict is turned into cultural synergy.¹

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is experiencing a period of rapid change particularly in the political, social and economic spheres as it becomes engaged in the social revolution of a modernised industrial society. Changes in the social and political environment, as well as with organizations operate with the increased interdependence between labour movements, business and political institutions could be expected throughout management, education, industry and an increasing need to understand cultural differences within the organization in order to facilitate change.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Differentiation between especially the black and white population groups as well as between the other cultural groups caused much conflict in the early 1980s. South African society and work organizations are characterized by an extreme cultural diversity, this reflecting the complexity of the society in which they belong. At the centre of this diversity is a complex array of human values which is of particular relevance to the work place. At the work place, different interest groups with different cultural and value

1. Cultural synergy is a process of mutual influence between cultures in contact out of which new aspects emerge which transcend these in the original culture.