Exploring indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace

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"Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone."

G.B. Stern (1890 – 1973)

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ABSTRACT

The end of the apartheid era witnessed a move towards the decolonisation of the South African workplace. Individuals with diverse cultures were more readily accepted into the workplace, especially those from indigenous African backgrounds.

As a result, indigenous cultural beliefs can no longer be negated in the current organisational context. While there is research that focusses on the benefits of integrating and acknowledging culture in the workplace, there is a lack of studies on what indigenous cultural beliefs employees bring to the workplace and how individuals manage workplace and indigenous identities. Considering South Africa's diverse workforce, this study aimed to understand the indigenous cultural beliefs that Black African employees bring to the workplace in corporate South Africa and how they negotiate their cultural and corporate identities within the workplace. I applied a qualitative approach, using the grounded theory method. I interviewed 35 employees from both managerial and administrative levels using semi-structured interviews. The Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis tool was used to create codes and themes for the large sections of text obtained from the interview data.

The findings of the study provided insights from the narratives of different employees regarding the indigenous cultural beliefs that they bring to the workplace. There are many challenges that Black African employees are presented with in the workplace, which leads them to engaging in cultural identity work. There is a lack of understanding regarding the role of traditional healers and how they contribute to promoting wellness among the Black African population.

The study contributes to the literature by providing insights on the negotiation of identities of Black African people within the formal workplace and the balancing act that they play to secure and maintain employment while simultaneously trying to uphold their cultural traditions. For HR practitioners and managers in the workplace, the study opens channels of dialogue, to understand Black African cultural practices and to encourage the accommodation of these practices within the workplace.

Key words: Identity work; indigenous knowledge; cultural beliefs; diverse workforce; ethnic identity; traditional healers; witchcraft; grounded theory

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The demolition of the discriminatory apartheid system in 1994 ended the brutal era of enforced racial divisions between black and white in the Republic of South Africa (SA). Under the new democratic government and a new Constitution, a “rainbow nation” comprising coloureds, blacks, whites, and Indians/Asians came together as a unified, democratic, open, and multicultural nation comprising people from extremely different historical, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu aptly coined SA and its people as the “rainbow nation”–a globally acknowledged term still used today when referring to the South African nation. It is important to note that whilst the laws promoting racial segregation under apartheid are now extinct, this does not mean it is the end of racial injustice (Matthews, 2012).

Whereas a slow growth in the South African economy was observed during the eighties and nineties, a definitive upward spiral was evident in the economy with the advent of an inclusive society after democracy in 1994 (Bhorat, Naidoo, Oosthuizen, & Pillay, 2015). The increase in labour market access led to changes in the composition of the South African workforce. The number of formally employed people in the country increased by 85% from 8.9 million in 1994 (Africa Check, 2018) to 16.4 million in 2020 (South African Market Insights, 2020). The increased number in the labour force together with affirmative action policies set the tone for dealing with a culturally diverse workforce from a workplace perspective (Booysen, 2007a). In the view of Fassinger (2008), being employed and having a job secures individuals’ material well-being and, more importantly, it is the cornerstone of their psychological health and well-being for the now as well as for the future.

Human resource practitioners (HR practitioners) and psychologists play a key role in understanding the effect that having employment has on individuals’ mental health and subjective well-being. Of more significance is that these professionals also recognise how diverse workplaces impact on individuals’ lifestyles and their overall well-being. Globally, over the last two decades significant changes in the demographic

composition of formal workplaces have been observed (Mor Barak, 2011). The result of this worldwide phenomenon is a greater awareness of the important role that workplace diversity fulfills to achieve economic success within and across national and international labour markets (Mor Barak, 2011). Workplace diversity can be of great benefit in environments where innovation and new ideas are required while diverse workplaces have also demonstrated competitive advantages, (Green, Lopez, Wysocki, & Kepner, 2002; Hoobler, Basadur, & Lemmon, 2007), performance benefits, and improved productivity (Salomon & Schork, 2003).

Despite the introduction of legislation to influence the well-being and inclusion of diverse populations in the workplace, ethnical diverse individuals such black Africans (who belong to various ethnic groups such as Zulu, Xhosa and Pedi for example) as well as Indians in South Africa and Hispanics, Latinos and African Americans still face many challenges (Carrim, 2019; Fassinger, 2008). Unfortunately, in the formal employment sector in SA, the cultural differences of an extraordinarily diverse ethnic and sociocultural workforce in geographic-bound areas close to cities still seems to be disregarded by employers and business partners. Ignoring national cultural differences leads to restricted access to work and the inadequate inclusion and underutilisation of the unique knowledge, skills, and competencies that such a workforce can bring to the workplace. A restrictive business culture in business practices affects employee attitudes and behaviours leading to a massive outflow of valuable talent. Providing “a foundation for developing culture-sensitive management systems can actually improve organizational performance” in strategic and tactical business planning (Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2011, pp. 189-190).

Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) observed the as yet unresolved issue of ongoing employee inequality in the workplace translates to racio-ethnic minority groups staying victim to ideological diversities in the work environment. Such inequality spans across race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, disability, age, and socioeconomic status. In the workplace, the emphasis should be on the recognition of such differences and creating a positive environment and experience for both employers and employees. This is the point where diversity management comes into effect–to create and maintain a positive work environment so that those who are similar and those who are different are equally valued (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Human resource practitioners play a critical role in

managing workplace diversity through interventions, training, policies, and communication.

It is important to bear in mind that most diversity studies are conducted in Western societies and developed countries, referred to as the Global North, such as the United States of America (USA), England, France, Australia, and Canada (Bond & Haynes, 2014; Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011) and therefore the current research does not necessarily address the needs of other regions and non-Western beliefs. In fact, it has been observed that global diversity initiatives of US companies have failed outside of the USA (Jonsen et al., 2011; Lauring, 2013). It is therefore urgent to promote research that focusses on diversity in specific regions and cultures. Jonsen et al. (2011) add that 90% of authors on diversity literature are American, Canadian, Australian, or British and most of them work for North American universities. Some research has also been conducted in non-Western contexts, referred to as the Global South, such as India and China (Cooke & Saini, 2012), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Alserhan, Forstenlechner, & Al-Nakeeb, 2009), Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore (Low, Roberts & Whiting, 2015) as well as SA (Carrim, 2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2019). However, most diversity management research has been or is related to studying minority gender diversity, religions, and attitudes towards diversity (Jonsen et al., 2011).

Moreover, previous diversity management studies centred mainly on different types of dimensions such as race, age, gender, sexual orientation, personality, and culture (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Jonsen et al., 2011; Madera, 2013) as well as indigenous management (Ewing, Sarra, Price, O'Brien, & Priddle, 2017; Haar & Brougham, 2013; Saini & Budhwar, 2008) and religion, spirituality and indigenous people (Al-Jenaibi, 2017; Haar & Brougham, 2013; Miley & Read, 2013). The focus of these studies has been on discrimination and stigmatisation related to the different types of the aforementioned dimensions in the workplace. Hence, a gap remains in terms of understanding how readily indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace are accepted, particularly in hybrid country contexts where Western and non-Westernised beliefs coexist. According to Holtbrügge (2013), indigenous concepts do not exist in their pure form but are characterised by intracultural differences as well as the influence of other cultures as a result of globalisation. This form of uniqueness was a central point in the

current study as its focus was on indigenous cultural beliefs that encompass locally constructed concepts.

The recent interest in studies on indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace may be ascribed to the fact that companies embrace globalisation and need to understand national culture and how this impacts business transactions and relationship building across continents (Carrim, 2020; Taras, et al., 2011). It was only in the latter part of the 20th century, after business people had begun to realise that understanding cultural beliefs was crucial to ensure successful relationships that researchers began to investigate individualistic cultures like the American way and collectivist cultures like the Japanese way. Air travelling and advancements in technology gave easier access to global business practice and labour markets. Consequently, business people became more aware of global similarities and less concerned with local differences. It was a critical mind shift that resulted in an emergent global work culture. But inconsistencies in how workplace culture is conceptualised resulted in limited reliable generalisations in the workplace (Taras et al., 2011).

To really understand national culture and management, Hofstede's model of culture is mostly used in organisations and businesses (Williamson, 2002). It is, however, important to understand this model on a micro-level especially when seeking a country-specific view on culture. While there may be similarities on a national level, it is of significance that Hofstede's study, conducted with employees of IBM across 50 different countries, reveals a variety of responses among individuals in a single company. This finding indicates the uniqueness of culture (Shi & Wang, 2011). While this finding regarding uniqueness of culture is related to international relations, it is critical to understand which indigenous cultural beliefs employees bring to the workplace at a country or local level. The focus of the current study was therefore on the indigenous cultural beliefs that Black African employees bring to the workplace and how they negotiate their cultural and workplace identities.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the past, despite entering the working environment while still holding fast to their indigenous cultural beliefs, individuals who found a job in a formal workplace still had to suppress it owing to the lack of tolerance in the workplace for such differences

(Lewis & Geroy, 2000). Currently, the trend in the workforce to value diversity and show a tolerance for indigenous cultural beliefs stems from acknowledging the workforce as culturally diverse (Booysen, 2007b). Likewise, in the South African context, The Bill of Rights (Chapter 2 of The Constitution) allows all South Africans equality in practicing their cultural beliefs in their place of work (South Africa, 1996b). The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 further allows for the expression of indigenous cultural beliefs if it does not interfere with the operations of the employer (SA Department of Labour, 2020).

The credibility of diversity management literature may be under threat as diversity management studies do not offer any relevance to management and human resource management practices (Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2006). In these studies, the needs of HR practitioners and employees who subscribe to indigenous belief systems are not considered neither addressed (Jonsen et al., 2011). Reade and McKenna (2013) advise that managers with multinational enterprises should move away from merely respecting local cultures. Instead, they should rather proactively integrate indigenous belief systems into the functioning of the organisation to achieve employee well-being and organisational effectiveness. Such integration is key to integrating indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, forestry, and medical activities.

Of note is that an employee should enter the workplace as a whole being; thus, it includes his or her indigenous cultural beliefs. In a study conducted by Haar and Brougham (2011) on indigenous culture in the workplace, it was found that the Maori people of New Zealand reported better job outcomes (such as loyalty, superior performance, and organisational citizenship behaviours) when they felt that their cultural beliefs were better understood in the workplace. Haar and Brougham's (2011) study highlights the need for employers to display a high regard for indigenous cultural beliefs. Against the backdrop of SA's diverse workforce, it is relevant and important to understand how organisations deal with the aspect of diversity management related to indigenous cultural beliefs as well as to understand the experiences of employees in the workplace.

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this research study was to understand the indigenous cultural beliefs that Black African people bring to the South African workplace, and how they negotiate their ethnic and professional identities. It further aimed to understand the role that specifically traditional healing and beliefs in witchcraft impact on individual employees' experiences of the workplace. Lastly, the aim was to provide guidance to employers and HR practitioners on how to deal proactively with indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace setting.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aimed to answer the following research questions within the South African workplace:

Research question 1: To what extent do indigenous cultural beliefs that are practiced at home and in community environments spill over into the workplace?

Research question 2: What are the perceptions of Black African employees regarding indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace?

Research question 3: What indigenous cultural beliefs do Black African employees manifest in the workplace?

Research question 4: To what extent do Black African employees engage in identity work related to their indigenous cultural beliefs?

Research question 5: To what extent are Black African employees discriminated and/or stigmatised due to their indigenous cultural beliefs?

Research question 6: To what extent are Black African employees willing to share their indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace setting?

1.5 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.5.1 Defining indigenous beliefs

Mangaliso and Damane (2001) state there are latent unobservable social attitudes that have an influence on observable workplace behaviour. The source of these social attitudes include history, folklore, mythology, culture, norms, values, and religious beliefs which all form part of a person's indigenous beliefs (Managliso & Damane, 2011). Traditional knowledge, beliefs, arts, and cultural expressions are handed down from generation to generation and are pure of influence (Janke, 2005) which makes them unique to a culture or society (Ghosh & Sahoo, 2011). According to Clarke (2001), indigenous people are descendants of a group of people who were the earliest inhabitants of a territory, making them native to the land. Indigenous people may also be descendants of the earlier inhabitants of a colonised territory (Britannica, n.d.). According to Gilbert (2017) there is approximately 50 million indigenous people who live on the African continent. Furthermore, they face hardship, discrimination and are marginalised from a cultural, social and economic point of view.

The indigenous Maori people of New Zealand serve as an example of the importance of indigenous beliefs in the workplace. Despite their integration into New Zealand society, they still experience challenges in the workplace. For the Maori people, their cultural identity is very important in the workplace context (Haar & Brougham, 2013). In studying the consequences of cultural satisfaction in the workplace for the Maori people, Haar and Brougham (2013) found that the Maori participants experienced higher levels of career satisfaction when their indigenous beliefs were acknowledged in the workplace thus confirming the crucial importance of valuing indigenous beliefs in the place of work.

The ubuntu philosophy of Black African people illustrates how indigenous cultural beliefs can be exercised and negotiated in the corporate work environment. Ubuntu is an African philosophy and way of life (Nafukho, 2006). It is used to capture a human construction that refers to the "state of being human" (Pio, Waddock, Managaliso, McIntosh, & Syed, 2013) or "humaneness" (Mangaliso & Damane, 2001). According to this philosophy, it is believed that all humans descend from a common ancestor, known as Ntu, and therefore they belong together, displaying characteristics of caring,

community, harmony, and respect. In the workplace setting, ubuntu manifests in leadership roles, age, relationships with others, communication, decision making, spirituality, and beliefs. From this perspective, age is viewed as a sign of maturity and grey hair indicates wisdom. When making promotion decisions, this should be considered as it will indicate service to an organisation. Employees with longer tenure are viewed as having more experience, networks, and wisdom in an organisation. Pio et al. (2013) assert this is starkly different to the Western traditional principles that view qualifications, performance, and ability as the key factors in promotion decisions. When Western principles are used to make promotion decisions it results in a sense of awkwardness among black Africans when a younger person is placed in a higher position than an older person. The younger one is obliged to show *ukuhlonipha* – meaning the younger person must show respect for the older person despite the former being in a position of seniority (Pio et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the Western culture there is a huge focus on production outputs and inputs with the key focus on cutting costs and maximising productivity. On the other hand, in African culture ubuntu means workers should take care of each other and exist in harmony.

Another example where ubuntu comes to the fore is given by Managliso and Damane (2001). When there is and economic downturn, employees who ascribe to ubuntu will rather take pay cuts across all levels of staff as opposed to having employees retrenched. The concept of ubuntu is high on collectivism and is directed towards the sharing of burdens so that suffering can be eased for others (Managliso & Damane, 2001).

McFarlane & Kennedy (2006) conducted a study on indigenous Australian people, who make up 2.4% of the Australian population, and their indigenous beliefs which may impact their adjustment to employment within the workplace. For example, amongst indigenous Australians, decision making is consensual, however in the Australian workplace culture, this is more direct and controlled by an individual. Therefore, indigenous Australians would be required to adjust to the way decisions are made in the modern Australian workplace, which differs from their beliefs. Furthermore, indigenous Australians ascribe to a collectivist approach whereas Australian society is individualistic. As a result, indigenous Australians may not be competitive within the workplace, or want to be singled out and praised for their efforts

in the workplace, as they would strive to be recognised as a group as opposed to individually.

It is evident from the examples mentioned that some awareness exists regarding certain different indigenous beliefs that can manifest in the workplace. Unfortunately, there is a dire lack of research studies in terms of indigenous beliefs brought to the workplace by black Africans. More worrying though, is the prevailing ignorance about how relevant black Africans' indigenous beliefs really are in the modern workplace. In a study conducted by du Plessis and Naudé (2017) on the identity of Black African adolescents, it was found that, owing to the multicultural backdrop of modern SA, the adolescent participants experienced complexities when having to commit to a cultural identity. Arowolo (2010) perceives that Western civilisation and culture has eroded the traditional beliefs of African people, making African cultural beliefs primitive and unacceptable in public. Based on this perception, the current study explored whether this is indeed the case by focussing on how openly black Africans are willing to share these practices in the work environment.

The concept of diversity relates to matters of difference and inclusion (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 1997). Workplace diversity is often associated with anti-discriminatory legislation and equal employment opportunities resulting from previous discrimination against disadvantaged groups such as non-whites, women, the disabled as well as those from cultural and religious minorities. However, managing a diverse workforce entails a broader perspective than merely focussing on race and gender; it includes all elements that humans have in common and those that are different. The consequences of not understanding how differences in values, norms, relationships, communication, and use of power can hinder an organisation's competitiveness may well be that a massive outflow of valuable collaborative talent and knowledge will prevent the optimising of organisational performance. Hence, understanding the indigenous cultural beliefs is crucial in a workplace setting (Joubert, 2017).

1.5.2 The South African context

In the modern South African work environment, employees come from many different cultural backgrounds. This complex mixture of cultures contributes greatly to the creation of the current diverse workforce (Carrim, 2015). The key participants in this

study were black Africans as they are generally regarded as the original and true inhabitants of SA before colonisation. Today they also make up the majority of the population of SA (Matoane, 2012). Population statistics from the Statista Research Department (2022) indicate that the Black African population group makes up 81.0% of the South African population. This is followed closely by Coloured at 8.8%, white at 7.7% and Indian/Asian at 2.6%. The study of black Africans is therefore pertinent to the literature. Interestingly, the Employment Equity Commission of South Africa found that the white race group is overly represented in the private sector's top and senior management positions (Business Tech, 2016), a fact that may bear influence on corporate culture in the South African workplace today.

During apartheid, the South African workplace consisted of homogeneous individuals who shared similar cultural practices (Carrim, 2015). After democracy in 1994, South Africa saw an increase in the number of Muslims, Hindus, Jews, followers of African indigenous beliefs, and other minority groups entering the workplace. This resulted in a greater expression of their indigenous beliefs thereby progressively transforming the distinguishly narrowness of the existing workplace culture. Post-apartheid legislation contributed greatly in allowing for better integration of diverse cultural groups with the workforce by means of equal opportunities and affirmative action legislated in the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012).

However, managing diversity in a workplace can be complicated. This is evidenced in several South African case laws that relate to accommodating cultural beliefs and practices and the extent to which the South African courts go to protect constitutional rights related to this particular phenomenon in the place of work (Prinsloo & Huysamen, 2018). It is evident that managers play an important role in trying to eliminate bias and prejudice as multiple beliefs and customs are sought to be accommodated in the workplace (Carrim, 2015). Thomas and Bendixen (2000) indicate it would be inappropriate to talk about a national culture in SA. These authors propose that "culture" should rather be viewed from an ethnic perspective because it is a consequence of the diversity existent in the rainbow nation of SA.

Currently, research studies undertaken to better understand cultural diversity in the South African context (Booysen, 2007b) feature mostly on understanding the impact of diversity on team performance (Kokt, 2003), the management implications of

ethnicity and diversity (Norris, 2000; Thomas & Bendixen, 2000), perceptions towards cultural diversity (Zulu & Parumasur, 2009), and knowledge management in a diverse organisation (Kruger & Johnson, 2013). Consequently, there is still a noticeable knowledge gap of what the actual indigenous beliefs are that black Africans bring to the formal South African workplace, and how employees who ascribe to such beliefs negotiate their identities in their different professions.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

A research design refers to the overall strategy to be used to answer the research questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2006) and the way the data will be collected and analysed (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Although my research topic contains an element of an ethnographic design in that I chose to engage with an ethnical very diverse group of participants, it was not my aim to observe participants in their work settings. I wanted to understand how they negotiated specifically their indigenous cultural beliefs that they practise in their real-life world in their professional life at work.

Foremost in my mind was that I had to choose an existing design and method, embed it in an existing philosophical framework, and follow prescribed techniques that would produce meaningful scripts from the participants, to answer the six research questions I had prepared.

The methodological choice I made was to use a grounded theory qualitative approach method. Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss. It is regarded as a qualitative research approach used to investigate social experiences and interactions (Taghipour, 2014). Charmaz (2006) expounds on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) stance that, because the grounded theory approach provides for the logical and consistent collection of data sets and methods of analysis, grounded theory allows a researcher to construct knowledge grounded in the experiences of participants in their everyday life. Creswell (2007) informs that a grounded theory helps to explain a practice or provides a framework for further research. The theory is said to be "grounded" in the experiences of the participants and does not come from already existing theories. Grounded theory is thus a qualitative research design in which the researcher provides a theory or an explanation for a process, action, or an interaction that is shaped by the input of a number of participants.

Qualitative data is descriptive as well as exploratory, and its main purpose is to understand human experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maree, 2007). The emphasis of the current study was on the meanings that the participants assigned to the questions that were asked. Qualitative sampling techniques aim to obtain information from specific groups within a population (Carrim, 2012). I used purposive sampling as this allowed me to select individuals who would be able to add meaningful, relevant information to the study. Snowball sampling was used to obtain chain referrals from individuals. In this study, 35 interviews were conducted, and the sample consisted of male and female employees across management and administrative levels. The majority of participants were Black African employees with two non-African human resource (HR) managers. Some of the Black African employees were HR managers in terms of their profession. The inclusion of the non-African human resource managers was to obtain their experiences on dealing with indigenous beliefs in the workplace, from an alternative perspective other than those of black Africans The research process continued until there was data saturation and no new themes emerged (Maree, 2007).

According to Maree (2007), ontology refers to the nature of reality. The reality includes names, concepts, and labels that form part of social as well as historical creations. The realities are used to make sense of the world. Epistemology refers to how knowledge is acquired about a phenomenon and how it is viewed from the world of the researcher (Carrim, 2012). An interpretive paradigm was adopted for the current study. A paradigm guides the researcher by describing a worldview or a set of beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The aim with this study was to understand the subjective and socially constructive meanings that participants associated with the topic under investigation and what their reality really was.

As already established in the introduction, SA is home to a diverse population as witnessed by its varied cultures, customs, traditions, and histories. The immense existing differences among its many peoples and their cultures is illustrated by the fact that it is the only country in the world with 11 official languages (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu) while promoting the development and use of other indigenous languages such as Khoi, Nama and San. Sign language is encouraged under its Constitution. In

addition, the national anthem is made up of four languages (isiXhosa, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English) (Uys, 2008, p. 301) while the National flag is multicoloured– black, gold, green, white, red and blue (South Africa, 1996b). Consequently, whereas it is expected in countrywide surveys or research studies that participants' reality always differs, the very complex multicultural setting in SA obviously lent itself to an exploration of the multitude extremely varied and unusually insightful experiences of the cosmopolitan realties of the participants in the current study. Charmaz (1996) explains the reason why multiple realties are forthcoming from a group of people is that it must be understood that individuals construct their experiences through different means, e.g., through their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings. I was convinced that using a constructivist grounded theory approach (as developed by Charmaz) with an interpretive tradition would guide me to find answers to the six research questions.

As part of the research methodology, a pilot study was conducted. The purpose of a pilot study is to determine whether the questions posed are relevant to the study (Ismail, Kinchin, & Edwards, 2018). By doing a pilot study, a researcher is usually able to determine whether the participants in the main study will understand and respond to the research questions and, if not, what problems need to be fixed before doing the main study. Questions may be ambiguous, unclear, or elicit vague and/or irrelevant answers to the research questions. During the pilot study possible problems with recording the data can also be sorted out (Saunders et al., 2012). A pilot study was conducted to help determine if the questions posed to the participants during the main study would be appropriate and sufficiently understandable to answer the research questions. It was also an opportunity to ensure that the data recording was in order, and that it would allow me to have clear audio recordings that could later be transcribed. The pilot study further allowed me to get comfortable with the interview setting and the asking of the interview questions. After the pilot study was concluded, it was found that beliefs in the ancestors, traditional healing and witchcraft is important for black Africans, and therefore, these topics were included in the study.

Ethics form an essential part of research studies. Gravetter and Forzano (2009) refer to research ethics as the responsibility of the researcher. I undertook to adhere to the requirements of qualitative research throughout the study process. Ethical principles

and how it was adhered to will be discussed in further detail in the methodolgy section in Chapter 3.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is unique in the sense that it addresses a critical issue relating to how management in the formal labour sector can assist a multicultural workforce with problems encountered while working, thereby contributing to SA's gross national product. In SA, black Africans with significantly different histories in terms of indigenous beliefs and cultures make up the majority of SA's formal sector workforce. Whether as individuals or groups, they bring these inherent values and beliefs to the workplace. It is important to understand this aspect of diversity in the workplace because by positively promoting a deeper understanding and accommodation of identity negotiation in the workplace, business expansion and corporate growth will eventuate. Hence, the current study sought to provide evidence and direction to this quest. It further created a reservoir to assist national and international business systems to remove divisions and realign management to foster unity of function between the workplace and the workforce.

The study shed light on important indigenous cultural factors that employers in SA should be aware of in order to accommodate Black African employees in the workplace. The insights provided by the Black African employees relates to how they negotiate their workplace identity in order to fit in. The study also focussed on the participants' perceptions towards witchcraft and traditional healing and the impact that this has on employees wellness in the workplace. By fostering sensitivity towards specific belief systems in the formal work context–beliefs which are often misunderstood and misinterpreted by other belief systems–any positive transformation that may occur in the working environment to better employee health and well-being may spill over to other studies on the important role that a healthy and motivated workforce plays in the process of workplace production.

Furthermore, the findings of the study has the potential to contribute to the creation and improvement of current workplace policies and it will also build a case for the importance of diversity awareness and the understanding of indigenous beliefs of

black Africans in the South African workplace, and how this understanding can contribute to more harmonious relationships between the employer and the employee.

1.8 LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

The findings of this study was limited to black Africans in workplaces in SA and is not a reflection of the experiences of black Africans in other countries. The participants in the study were based in three of the nine provinces in SA, namely Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal are the biggest provincial economies in SA (Stats SA, 2019). The majority of the participants subscribed to the Xhosa culture. Exploring the experiences of other minority cultures in future studies may be fruitful.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The key terms used throughout this study are defined next.

1.9.1 Ancestors

Ancestors (or forefathers) refer to the deceased spirits of family members who are related by blood to their living descendants who believe in their ancestors and their spiritual powers. The ancestors act as mediators in the lives of the living and include deceased parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles (Adamo, 2011). The belief in ancestors and their spiritual presence and guidance forms an integral part of the various Black African races' belief systems. The healing powers of the ancestors and seeking their help when in distress and thanking them when experiencing good fortune are of particular importance to those who believe in them.

1.9.2 Black African

The term 'black African' refers to individuals from the African race born in SA and who are native to the country. As SA citizens, under The Constitution they belong to different indigenous ethnic groups which are Zulu, Xhosa, Northern Sotho, Tswana, Ndebele, Southern Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, and Swazi, each with its own sociocultural end ethnic systems (South Africa, 1996). However, as indigenous groups a major part

of their shared culture is the belief in traditional healing and witchcraft. By far the majority also believe in the spiritual powers of their ancestors.

1.9.3 Identity

Identity refers to constructions of how we perceive ourselves and others and may consist of personality factors, demographic factors, or group memberships (Cruz, 2017). Thirty-three participants were indigenous black single or married male or female South African citizens of all ages, educational levels, and religious denominations. All were employed in the formal, structured work sector and paid in a formal way. Although they came from different sociocultural ethnicities, most shared a belief in traditional healing by sangomas, in witchcraft, and the healing powers of muthi. Two of the participants were HR managers, one male and one female and they were of the Indian race.

1.9.4 Imphepho

This refers to the flowers of the Helichrysum plant which is used as ritual incense in Black African traditional medicinal practices. Burning imphepho is the ritual (customs or ways of doing things) of burning these flowers (sometimes together with other herbs) to activate its powers to communicate with the ancestors (Ashforth, 2005; Sobiecki, 2014).

1.9.5 Isiphandla

This refers to a hide skin, usually of a goat or a cow, and bead bracelets worn by black Africans after a ceremony (Govender & Ruggunan, 2013). It also worn by people who answered the calling to train to be a sangoma. The hide is worn as a bracelet around the wrist for between six to eight days or as instructed by a sangoma and cannot be cut off – it must fall off by itself. It can be smelly during the first few days of wearing it, as the hide skin is fresh from a recently slaughtered animal.

1.9.6 Muthi

A traditional word for medicine but could also refer to poison. It is a concoction of herbs that is used to achieve either healing through cleansing, strengthening, or protecting

a person from evil, or it could be used for negative means such as witchcraft, to bring about illness, misfortune, or death (Ashforth 2005; Semenya, 2013). Witchcraft is viewed among the indigenous cultures as the main reason, or explanation given for misfortunes that befall an individual, families or the community (Ludsin, 2003).

In the Concise Oxford English dictionary (2006, p. 944) “muti” is defined as an “African medicine or magical charms” and “medicine of any kind”. The word originates from the Zulu word *umuthi* meaning a plant or medicine. It is further noted that the spelling “muti” is used in the general sense, but since this study is specifically concerned with the traditional beliefs and culture of a specific group of indigenous people, the term “muthi” will be used consistently.

1.9.7 Negotiating identity

Identity work is used to solve incongruence in personal and organisational identities. Individuals engage in identity work that includes selective disclosure, actively trying to change others’ perceptions, and continuously working and reworking their identities to achieve a sense of coherence (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). A person can also have multiple social groups such as identifying as black, educated, and being a woman. In this study the Black African employees’ ethnicity and cultural belief determined which actions and beliefs they uphold in their current workplaces. As individuals, they had a choice to either adhere to or ignore the rules of their belief system and adapt to the workplace culture, or to negotiate their identity as indigenous Black African citizens whose belief system included their belief in traditional healing, witchcraft, and muthi.

1.9.8 Sangoma

A sangomas is a spiritual healer and can be male or female. They are chosen by the ancestors who call them to go for training to become a sangoma. When diagnosing an illness, sangomas listen to their ancestors. They wear special clothes and beads when communicating with the ancestors who speak through them. Sangomas fulfil a special role in Black African communities and are believed to be good healers because they look at illnesses and difficulties encountered by individuals, families and the communities in a holistic way. Trainee sangomas are known as initiates and can train for long periods of time – from months to years.

1.9.9 The calling to become a sangoma

When a Black African child or person is afflicted by some kind of mysterious illness, usually accompanied by headaches, having disturbed dreams or receiving visions, experience psychosis, and have shoulder and neck pains among others (Cumes, 2013) which Western doctors are unable to diagnose, it is possible that the ancestors have been “calling” him or her to train as a sangoma. These “illnesses” can occur at any time in their lives. Such mysterious illnesses will not disappear until the calling to become a sangoma is accepted and training begins. A person can only become a sangoma if they have received a calling from their ancestors to be trained as a sangoma. He or she cannot decide to become a sangoma; they have to receive “the calling”. The calling to become a sangoma is known as *ukuthwasa* in isi-Xhosa.

1.9.10 Traditional healing

Traditional healing means the treatment of illnesses with herbs. It refers to the knowledge, skills and practices that are based on beliefs and cultures to maintain health and prevent and diagnose physical and mental illnesses (World Health Oganization, 2017). Traditional healing is the main job of a sangoma. If a Western doctor cannot diagnose an ongoing illness or as an alternative to western treatment, a sangoma is visited to cure the patient in a traditional way by calling upon the ancestors’ help and giving the patient muthi.

1.9.11 Witchcraft

In the context of this study, it refers to the use of muthi to cause harm to other individuals through illness, misfortune, or even death (Ashforth, 2005). Jealousy among some black Africans is a major dilemma in the South African workplace. Some employees who prosper and grow in their work want to ensure others do not succeed, while some of those who do not prosper want to bring down those who are prosperous in the workplace (Ashforth, 2005). Sangomas are trained to help and heal people, in other words, to “do good deeds”. Unfortunately, some sangomas do engage in witchcraft; but they either will not admit it or “hide” the fact that thay are available to do “evil”.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The study was structured as set out below.

- Chapter 2: Literature review
  This chapter elaborates on indigenous cultural beliefs, case law related to cultural beliefs and the theories that underpinned this study.
- Chapter 3: Research methodology
  This chapter informs on the research design and methods used in the study.
- Chapter 4: Theme 1: Sculpting the Black African ethnic identity
  This chapter focusses on the background of the participants and those factors that influence their alignment to indigenous cultural beliefs.
- Chapter 5: Theme 2: Indigenous Africans' belief in the 'unseen'
  This chapter discusses muthi, sangomas and witchcraft.
- Chapter 6: Theme 3: Navigating the workplace
  This chapter highlights the impact and experience of indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace.
- Chapter 7: Theme 4: Interventions to accommodate Black Africans in the workplace.
  This chapter focusses on steps that can be taken to accommodate black Africans in the workplace
- Chapter 8: Discussion of findings
  This chapter summarises the findings and highlights the unique contribution of the study as well as recommendations for future research.
- Chapter 9: Conclusion and recommendations
- Chapter 10: Reflection

1.11 POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

As the researcher, I have a keen interest in studying diversity within the work environment and this is the reason why I have selected this topic. I am an industrial psychologist by profession and work as a HR manager, which further spurs my keen interest in the study of indigenous cultures within the workplace. Being a Muslim South African, of Indian origin, I belong to a minority group, both within the race and religious

spheres. I can relate to and understand the challenges which minorities or indigenous people may experience within the workplace. Previous research, conducted by me, includes a study on the experiences and challenges of Muslim women who wear the hijab (headscarf) in the South African workplace.

It is my hope that further exploration of the Black African indigenous people within the work context, will equip employers and practitioners with the necessary knowledge to create a harmonious working environment where everyone, including black Africans, feel that their beliefs are respected and reasonably accommodated within the workplace.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an introduction to the current study and focused on key aspects such as the research questions, the significance of the study and the limitations.

The next chapter will cover in more detail indigenous cultural beliefs, South African legislation and theories which formed the cornerstone for this study.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I provide some literature evidenced background on the indigenous beliefs of black Africans and the South African workplace. I start with an overview of the South African population's landscape focussing on ethnicity, religion, and culture. Next, I discuss the meaning and definition of culture and what it means to belong to an indigenous culture. The indigenous culture of black Africans will then be explored in depth with examples provided from the workplace's perspective regarding current cultural beliefs. This will be followed by a discussion on the theories that formed the backbone of this study.

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION LANDSCAPE

2.2.1 Ethnicity

Central to this study is the importance of fully grasping the intricate composition of the South African population. This is an important factor because the existing ethnic diversities among and between the workforce and the workplace influence the national workplace culture. Taras et al. (2011, p. 191) state "culture-sensitive management systems … can actually improve organizational [*sic*] performance".

The South African black population is divided into four major ethnic groups: the Nguni group (comprising the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and Swazi), Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga, and Venda (Populationu, 2021). The group division provided by this author needs clarification since it differs from the classification stipulated in The Constitution (South Africa,1996). In fact, the different classifications of black Africans is definite evidence that dividing the country's black citizens into specific groups is impossible. To complicate matters further, the nine indigenous groups are sub-divided into various tribes that are spread over the nine provinces in SA. Each tribe comprises micro-tribes with their own culture and dialect. What is important for the current study, is to clarify that the participants selected from the three provinces consisted mainly of the Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, and Swazi groups. Participants from minority groups, the Mpondo and Pedi, were also interviewed.

Despite sharing the same race, black Africans ascribe to traditional belief systems and cultural practices that are unique to their specific ethnic groups (Cultural Atlas, 2022). The coloured people in SA are individuals of mixed descent and their lineage is a combination of primarily black, Malay, Khoi, San, Indian, and European ancestries (Adams, van de Vijver, de Bruin, & Beuno Torres, 2014). The Indian population consists of the descendants of indentured labourers who came to SA in the 1800s in search of a better life. The core white population are descendants from Europe. The Dutch was the first to establish a settlement in Table Bay (that later became Cape Town) in 1652. Located at the southernmost tip of the African Continent, the purpose was to supply passing ships with fresh produce. The British Settlers arrived in the early 1800s. Britain colonised the Cape and it became known as the Cape Colony (Steyn, 2016). During the 20th century, SA's population grew exponentially as immigrants from European countries such as Germany, France, Greece, and Portugal settled in SA (Adams et al., 2014; Steyn, 2016).

2.2.2 Religion

As a result of their varied cultural practices, each of the indigenous Black African tribes ascribe to their own form of religious principles that govern their communities and political systems (Masondo, 2018). All these religions come together under the umbrella religion known as African Traditional Religion (Onuzulike, 2008) which forms the foundation and basics that govern life for black Africans. However, over decades many black Africans have converted to other religions (Onuzilike, 2008).

The Colonial era saw the arrival of European missionaries on the African Continent who sought to 'civilise' the inhabitants native to Africa through Western belief systems. This very much undermined their traditional African beliefs (Masondo 2018). African Traditional Religion was discarded with hostility and those who practised it were believed to be condemned (Adamo, 2011). Masondo (2018) explains Westerners created biases of Black African people that depicted them as primitive, dealing in human sacrifices, witchcraft, and cannibalism which provided justification for missionaries to spread their religious beliefs across the whole of Africa. Their Western religious beliefs were even reason enough to enslave African nations.

As black Africans were given a bigger role in the religiosity of the country, it was also Black African evangelists who went from area to area to promote Christianity. Missionaries established schools in SA that, apart from education, also provided Christianity as the root faith for those who attended those schools (Masondo, 2018). In spreading the Christian religion, missionaries required that black Africans denounce their own African traditional religions and practices such as circumcision, lobola, and polygamy and embrace Christianity along with Western cultural practices. Lobola is a cultural ritual whereby an African male has to pay an agreed-upon price to the father of the girl he wants to marry. This payment is generally made in cattle among indigenous black Africans and is known as 'bride's price' (Concise Oxford English dictionary, 2006, p. 835).

Black theology in SA came into being as a result of the Black Consciousness Movement and the establishment of African Independent Churches that opposed the church's perceived support for apartheid (Struby, 2018). Splitting from missionary churches in the late 19th century, black theology aimed to ensure the autonomy of black people through their desire to retain their African culture in light of white domination (Bowers du Toit, 2018). The primary message of Christianity preached in missionary churches that Jesus was there to set the oppressed (black people) free was viewed as the main driver for establishing African Independent Churches (Moore, 2018).

The topic of this study centres very specifically on the religious beliefs of indigenous black Africans. Therefore, I explored the origins, linguistic meanings and applications of the words *traditional* versus *indigenous*. The definitions were found in the Oxford Learners Dictionary (2022a, 2022b).

> Traditional is defined as "being part of the beliefs, customs or way of life of a particular group of people, that have not changed for a long time" whereas indigenous is "(Of [*sic*] people and their culture) coming from a particular place and having lived there for a long time before other people came there; relating to, belonging to or developed by these people".

According to Adamo (2011), the preference is to use African Indigenous Religion instead of African Traditional Religion when referring to religiosity across countries on

the African Continent because it is one religion with various versions. African Indigenous Religion is similar to that of Christianity which has different denominations. African Traditional Religion is described by Mbiti (1991, pp. 13-14) as

> the product "of the thinking and experiences of our forefathers and mothers that is men, women and children of former generations. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community."

In addition, Onuzulike (2008) confirms that in SA the culture and religiosity of black Africans are intertwined with the Black African religious beliefs embedded in the Black African culture that stretches across the African Continent. Consequently, for the purpose of this study and because their beliefs are embedded in the Black African culture and religiosity, African Indigenous Religion is used. African Indigenous Religion governs all aspects of life in Black African societies in SA. African Indigenous Religion is established around several main characteristics being God, humanity, sacrifices, afterlife, and the ancestors (Adamo, 2011).

2.2.2.1 Belief in God

The Black African indigenous religious beliefs indicate that God does exist. The existence of God is thus not disputed (Adamo, 2011). According to Oborji (2002), when there seems to be strain in the relationship between God and humans, the use of traditional medicines (muthi) and performing sacrifices, deemed as religious by the indigenous people, will improve their relationship with God.

2.2.2.2 Ancestors

Their ancestors play an important role in the lives of black Africans (Ratiba, 2015). The key role of ancestors is to act as intermediaries between God and the living family members (Adamo, 2011; Mendonsa, 1976). The ancestors are believed to be generations of older family members who had passed away. The spirits of the deceased possess the powers to bless, protect, and punish families (Adamo, 2011). They provide people with the gift to heal others and the ability to predict what might happen in the future (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Ceremonies that involve the sacrifice

of an animal may be performed for the ancestors, e.g., for thanksgiving. seeking help from the ancestors if one experiences misfortune (Edwards, 2011), and at particular life stages such as birth, death, adolescence, and marriage (Edwards, Makunga, Thwala, & Mbele, 2009). Animals that are sacrificed include goats, sheep, cows, or bulls (Edwards et al., 2009). If individuals are in harmony with the ancestors, it will result in peace, unity, and prosperity for the family. Morgan and Wieringa (2005) explain ancestors can be male or female. Also, the presence of ancestors can be felt in different ways such as feeling a physical sensation on the shoulder or in the head or being able to have a conversation with the ancestor without seeing him or her (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Furthermore, an individual may communicate with a single ancestor, or one may communicate with multiple ancestors (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005).

2.2.2.3 Belief in good and evil

The belief in, and difference between, good and evil is an important concept in African Indigenous Religion. Adamo (2011) points out that God is believed to bring about good; but evil is caused by human beings who bring this evil upon themselves. Evil is regarded as any misfortune that may befall an individual, community, or any actions that may cause displeasure to God or the ancestors such as not obeying the wishes of the ancestors. Evil is attributed to the works of evil spirits, witches, sorcerers, the ancestors, and also the consequences of broken taboos and/or oaths. Furthermore, if any evil from God or the ancestors befalls an individual or community, it is likely to be a disciplinary or punitive measure taken by God or the ancestors as a result of disobedience or punishment for wrongdoing (Adamo, 2011; Nenge, Jonah, Odei & Ozigi, 2020).

2.2.2.4 Sacrifices

In African Indigenous Religion, evil is overcome and the relationship between people living on earth and the ancestors is cemented through the sacrifice of the blood of animals or birds (Adamo, 2011). Two types of sacrifices can be made. One has a positive aim, to please the ancestors or to show gratitude to them. The second is when sacrifices are done as a means of a peace offering to the ancestors, or to ward off danger or evil that causes illness (Adamo, 2011).

2.2.3 African Indigenous Religion and Christianity

Onuzlike (2008) states when two different realities come together, there is a risk of conflict. The conflict between the religious heritage of black Africans and that of Christianity in SA is such a reality. Because African Indigenous Religion and Christianity differ considerably, it is difficult for Black African individuals to maintain certain cultural traditions if they embrace Christianity (Onuzlike, 2008). It is further observed by Adamo (2011) that especially in times of crisis, such as when one is experiencing misfortune, black Africans tend to turn back to practices of African Indigenous Religion.

Before 1994, the relationship between African Indigenous Religion and Christianity had been fragile for decades in SA. During the apartheid years, African Indigenous Religion was widely practiced, but in secret. The reason for this secrecy was because colonial missionaries (whether of the Methodist, Anglican, or Catholic faith) were opposed to all African Indigenous religious practices labelling it as “barbaric” or “superstitious” (Adamo, 2011; Denis, 2006). For example, in accordance with Xhosa traditions, it is required of a male to attend a ceremony to be circumcised. Circumcision ensures that his status changes from that of a boy to a man. According to Masondo (2018), Christian missionaries did not want male black Africans to continue with this age-old indigenous practice. This led to the ritual being continued in secret because under traditional Xhosa pressure, their young men were obliged to make this switch from being a boy to becoming a man. If not done, these boys would be teased at gatherings or ceremonies.

However, under the demographic South African government the importance of African indigenous knowledge systems are recognised. Black African traditional healers have been urging the government for more dialogue with regard to African Traditional Religious practices as healing forms part of such practices (Denis, 2006). South African law made provision for the Traditional Health Practitioners Act 22 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007), which indicates in section 4 that an interim traditional healer’s council was formed. Membership to this council indicates that a traditional healer who is registered with the council, may issue a medical certificate to patients that would be acceptable in workplaces for absences related to being ill (Jordaan, 2022). As a result of this Act, traditional healers now fall within the category of a person certified to

diagnose and treat patients. Van Straaten (2021) notes that since the establishment of the Traditional Health Practice Council there has not been an operational website for the council, nor any register which contains the names and identities of all those traditional healers who are registered with the council. This indicates it is a platform that requires further attention. Apart from these operational issues, Nzimande et al., (2021) has also noted that some traditional healers argue that registration with the Traditional Health Practice Council is of no value to them, as they conveyed that their only registration is with their ancestors, and they could not understand why previous generations of traditional healers could operate out of the framework of the council. Furthermore, traditional healers did not understand the registration process, the benefits they would receive and what would be expected of them. They also likened the payment of a registration fee to being associated with apartheid, where they had to pay a 'penalty' for being black.

Adamo (2011) emphasises that despite the existence of Christianity, the practices of African Indigenous Religion are not en route to extinction but are still practised by black Africans today. With the intersection of African Indigenous Religion and Christianity, the result is that black Africans lose the richness of their culture. What is then casually passed down to the next generation may be perceived as an "imitation-like" Black African religious culture (Onuzlike, 2008).

The aforementioned circumcision example indicates a conflict between religious and cultural beliefs. The question remains as to whether black Africans are moulded by beliefs in Christianity, countrywide beliefs in African Indigenous Religion, or both. Furthermore, how does their religious beliefs influence and shape their beliefs and behaviour in the work environment?

2.3 CULTURE

Tylor (as cited in Čeněk, 2015) defines culture as "that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Čeněk, 2015, p1). The word *culture* originates from the Latin word *cultura* which means "to till or to cultivate" (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Culture by its very nature cannot be controlled by researchers; culture influences human behaviour. According to Kim et al. (2006), culture can only

be understood from the inside by a native or an insider of a specific culture. An outsider, one who does not ascribe to that culture, will demonstrate a limited understanding of the culture. Whether internal or external, both stances are important from a psychological perspective.

There are many aspects to indigenous psychology. Some researchers may seek to understand what is universal across cultures while for others it is important to understand where the differences lie (Hwang, 2004). In the view of Taras et al. (2011), culture is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. It extends beyond dress, language, cuisine, rituals, and architecture and also encompasses the implicit beliefs and tacit values that are shared by a group of people. In essence, culture is a social collective which translates to belonging to a group of people (Ferdman, 1995). It includes all learned and standardised behaviours that are expected of such a group of individuals (Bhaduiy, 1991).

It is critical to acknowledge that organisations consist of employees. While an organisation is a collective, employees are individuals. Each employee will therefore come to the organisation with their own cultural beliefs as well as other beliefs, e.g., religious beliefs or learnings that stem from their upbringing and mould their behaviour. Bialostocka (2010) refers to the iceberg analogy where the visible portions of diversity remain race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability. The invisible portions that come to the fore over time are culture, religion, and politics. All of these inform culture. According to Martin (2014), a negative effect of cultural diversity in the workplace is that it may lead to interpersonal conflict due to differences in opinions, thoughts, and beliefs. An example of this is disagreements regarding political topics such as terrorism. This may lead to negative sentiments which could be detrimental for organisations.

2.4 EXPLORING INDIGENOUS CULTURAL BELIEFS

Indigenous cultures exist across the world. In this section I explore some of these cultural beliefs and the impact it has on the workplace environment.

Robertson, Al-Khatib, Al-Habib, and Lanoue (2001) found that among the Arabian people in the Middle East, indigenous cultural beliefs indeed spill over into the

workplace. In the Arab world, the Bedouin tribal codes comprising loyalty and honour together with dominant patriarchal family structures forms the core of Middle Eastern culture. Authority also follows a top-down cultural structure. Further influences on the Middle Eastern culture include the presence of Islam. Islamic beliefs influence legal, political, and business environments to the extent that in Saudi Arabia the Qur'an is regarded as the constitution of the country (Robertson et al., 2001).

Further to this, cultural traditions of gender segregation are upheld in the workplace in Saudi Arabia, although it is more relaxed in countries like Kuwait and Oman. In the Arab Gulf region, generalisations about the traditional role of women have actually hampered the progression and advancement of women in the workplace. The corporate world has been almost exclusively reserved for males because of the social structures in the country. The World Economic Forum (2021) published a report on gender gaps in various countries and it was reported that in Saudi Arabia, there are low levels of labour force participation with women comprising only 6.8% of managers within the country resulting in a gap of 93% when compared to men. Furthermore, it was reported that in Saudi Arabia the gender pay gap is so large that a woman's income is approximately only 24% of a man in a similar role. Robertson, et al. (2001) inform that the education of Arab men increases their responsibility and authority both at home and in the workplace. Consequently, their power, dominance, and control over affairs in both environments are unrivalled. The impact of this phenomenon on employees can be devastating. Educated individuals do not see the need to involve others in decision-making processes and less emphasis is placed on group dynamics because of having an education (Dickson & Buchholz, 1979).

Hispanics constitute 18% of the American workforce. This is larger than any other ethnic group in America (Flores, 2017). Numerous studies have been conducted on Hispanics in the workplace. The majority of these studies focus on topics relating to the perceptions of Hispanic workers of prejudice and discrimination at work. Indeed, in the United States of America (USA), Hispanics are on the receiving end of discrimination in the workplace (Jones, Ni, & Wilson, 2009). They are notably different to non-Hispanics in the workplace because of their visible characteristics such as their Spanish names, cultural background, and language (Guerrero & Posthuma, 2014).

Research indicates that Hispanics disagree with the notion that religious beliefs should influence business decisions. They therefore withhold their cultural beliefs in the workplace (Peppas, 2006). Also, Hispanics demonstrate greater social support to Hispanic colleagues than to other race groups. In the opinion of Amason, Allen, and Holmes (1999), the upholding of close-knit community values inherent to a collectivist culture is mirrored in individuals' and group employee's behaviours in the workplace. The gender roles of Hispanics that influence behaviour in the workplace is associated with educational level, self-esteem, and acculturation (Valentine, 2006). Hispanics also come into the workplace seeking opportunities to help others; a characteristic that typifies Hispanic culture (Stone, Stone-Romero, & Johnson, 2007).

From an Indian perspective, Bhaduiy (1991) indicates that Indian cultural beliefs include discipline, communication, and consultation. Traditionally, a Western approach to work upholds the ideal that all work is a means of contributing to the good of society. In contrast, in Indian society there still exists a favour for hierarchy at work as it indicates authority. This may be due to the existence of the caste system in India (Chatterjee & Heuer, 2006). Indian managers tend to demonstrate themselves as "power figures" and this is how they gain respect (Tan & Khoo, 2002). Leaders also provide protection for employees in exchange for the respect shown (Heuer, 2002).

Additionally, Indians frown upon manual work and, as mentioned by Bhaduiy (1991), young middle class Indian individuals are forced to work in factories. This work environment does not leave them feeling happy, proud, or fulfilled. In fact, when Indians engage with subordinates, they exhibit arrogance and take on an authoritative attitude. On the other hand, when engaging with senior or business leaders, their attitude turns respectful and subservient to demonstrate their willingness to assist their superiors. Curiously though, they place great emphasis on teamwork. This is quite opposite to an Indian male's inherent trait to be seen as a person of influence and importance. According to Heuer (2002), Indians retain a strong identity of family and religious values. It is evident from the examples provided that Hispanics, Indians, and Arabs manifest their cultural beliefs in the workplace.

2.5 AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CULTURE

African indigenous culture refers to black Africans' endemic beliefs which have been passed on via oral communication (storytelling) from generation to generation over centuries (Carrim, 2015). The main reason why black Africans' indigenous beliefs are so important to them is because it helps them to maintain harmony between the living and the ancestors or 'living dead' (Denis, 2006). It is through this belief system that black Africans develop a relationship with the ancestors to prevent misfortune, accidents, or disease which are likely to occur if the ancestors do not protect their descendants (Denis, 2006).

As people who have a higher stance in community life, sangomas (traditional healers) and *inyangas* (herbalists) have more direct access to the ancestors than the common person in the street. Matoane (2012) states the colonisation of the local black inhabitants and their particular culture led to the erosion of the Black African culture. Included in this erosive process was their faith in traditional Black African belief systems because it was regarded as inferior and something that should be discarded. Hence, the question that remains is how did this rift affect the shaping of black Africans' identities in the modern workplace?

2.6 MUTHI AND TRADITIONAL HEALERS

Traditional healers play a pivotal role in preserving peoples' indigenous identities in a Westernised country (Thornton, 2009). Traditional healers continue to attract inhabitants spread over large areas of the African Continent. Despite the colonialists' abhorrence thereof and the efforts they made to rid the local people of their apparent barbaric rituals and beliefs, the current growing interest in knowledge systems revived interest in traditional healers and the significant role they play in Black African culture (Nyundu & Naidoo, 2016).

Traditional healers practise traditional medicine which is defined by the World Health Organization (2020) as follows:

> … the sum total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well

> as the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.

Traditional healers' practices range beyond the field of health care. It includes counselling, divination, and other services which they offer to protect people from accidents, theft, unemployment, and the even loss of love (Thornton, 2009). They are also involved in directing birth and death rituals, finding lost cattle, opposing witchcraft, and protecting warriors (Bantjes, Swartz, & Cembi, 2018).

The word "sangoma" is defined as "a person of the drum". It refers to the drums that sangomas beat to go into a trance or to communicate with the ancestral spirits (Podolecka, 2016). Sangomas are traditional healers and are also known as "diviners" who communicate with the spiritual and supernatural realm to receive help from the ancestors to understand and treat illnesses (Kale, 1995). Even still today, the practices of these traditional healers and diviners have a large appeal to many people on the African Continent (Nyundu & Naidoo, 2016). While in general the role of traditional healers is not difficult to understand or grasp, it is crucial for the purpose of this study to understand their influence on the lives of black Africans in the 21st century formal Westernised workplace.

Sangomas and *inyangas* use muthi (healing medicines) consisting of herbs and other substances as part of their traditional healing practices (Moore & Sanders, 2001; Tshoose, 2018). The word "muthi" is derived from the Zulu language. The root word is –*thi* which apparently signifies "tree" (Ashforth, 2005). From an English perspective, muthi is regarded as either medicine or poison crafted by an expert–a traditional healer, an *inyanga*, or a sangoma (in isiZulu) or *ngaka* (in Sesotho) (Ashforth, 2005). Muthi is used for the purposes of healing, cleansing, and protecting oneself from evil forces (Ashforth, 2005). To fight of evil omens, muthi bought from a traditional healer is sprinkled on a person's body or in the home or business to protect the person against the evil (Ally, 2015). Most black Africans believe a sangoma uses her or his powers for good and for healing, but it has been said that some use their powers for evil purposes (Ludsin, 2003).

Semenya (2013) agrees with Ashforth (2005) that as a poison, muthi may be used to bring about illness, misfortune, or to even order death upon others. Many of the

research studies I found on the use of muthi in SA conclude that jealousy drives many black Africans to use witchcraft because they feel insecure as individuals or in the workplace. For example, Ashforth (2005) notes more and more people die at an early age due to painful and incurable infections because of witchcraft. Black Africans also spend lots of their time, money, and energy to protect themselves against witchcraft (Ashforth, 2005; Bähre, 2002).

The belief in witchcraft is common among many indigenous cultures. In the opinion of Ludsin (2003), witchcraft is viewed among the indigenous cultures as the main reason, or explanation given for misfortunes that befall an individual. For example, if a person suddenly dies from a heart attack or if cattle die as a result of a disease, the cause of death would be explained as “a misfortune” that happened. Niehaus, Mohlala and Shokane (2001) assert black Africans will always seek a cultural understanding of the *why* when something negative occurs. It is quite normal for them to view a misfortune as the result of some ancestor’s anger or the result of witchcraft. With the latter, their belief is very firm that someone tries to inflict harm on an individual (Ludsin, 2003). In trying to understand the reason for misfortune, black Africans turn to traditional healers to explain *why* a misfortune befell them.

Ratiba (2015) states among black Africans, many still rely on cultural and traditional beliefs when addressing and interpreting an illness issue. The author mentions that illness, from a Black African perspective, is divided into two categories: those that are caused naturally, and those that are linked to the supernatural. Misfortune or illness is almost always attributed to actions of angry or upset ancestral spirits. On the other hand, Kopytoff (1971) observes that ancestral pleasure can be obtained by pleasing the ancestors with sacrifices. However, ancestral displeasure is brought about by neglecting them and this leads to punishment (Kopytoff, 1971). It is quite clear to understand that if a person forgets or refuses to acknowledge the ancestors for her or his success, good health, or wealth, he or she will receive severe punishment from them. According to Ratiba (2015), punishment comes in the form of unexplained illnesses that disappear once the individual starts to acknowledge the ancestors again.

Sangomas are chosen by the ancestors (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005) and receive their training from someone who is already an established sangoma. On the path to becoming a sangoma, the person is usually afflicted by an illness which Western

doctors are unable to diagnose. The calling to become a sangoma is known as *ukuthwasa* (Niehaus et al., 2004). Hund (2004) adds psychological states that occur during the *ukuthwasa* process are not classified in Western classification schemes. Such mysterious illnesses will not disappear until the calling to become a sangoma is accepted and training begins.

During the training period, the initiate is taught how to prepare herbal medicines, interpret dreams, communicate with the spirits, and diagnose illnesses. Furthermore, the initiate learns the particular history, mythology, and rituals associated with the tribe or group. Because sangomas spend time to counter curses or witchcraft (*ukuthakatha in isi-Xhosa*) (Blackmore, 2007), they are often referred to as "witchdoctors", but a sangoma is classified as a diviner, shaman, and healer and is by no means a witch (Hund, 2004). The moment a sangoma brings harm to a person, he or she is no longer viewed as a sangoma, but a doer of evil deeds (Mutwa, 1996). In a study conducted by Semenya (2013), it was found that black Africans who regarded themselves as Christians and attended the Basotho Reformed Church, did indeed engage in rituals and practices using muthi for healing and not evil purposes. The latter happens in witchcraft when muthi is used with the intent of causing evil or bringing bad luck to a person or people.

Black Africans consulting a sangoma or making use of witchcraft is part of their cultural lifestyle and daily reality. Two examples to prove this reality in SA are of note. The first is a case that occurred in the early 1990s when 600 people accused of witchcraft in Limpopo province were killed by community members (Semenya, 2013). In 2020, social media ran amok after allegations had been made that local celebrities in SA used witchcraft to become successful (Independent Online (IOL), 2020). This happened after author Jackie Phamotse had accused celebrities of using snakes to further their careers. Ms Phamotse apparently also claimed celebrities became successful because they constantly visited sangomas for assistance to become even more successful. Social media followers were divided. Some vehemently stated the claims were baseless and others just as vehemently said the claims were true.

It is a firm belief among Black African societies that there is a spiritual reason for every disease. Influenza, commonly known as "the flu", is accordingly actually caused by an evil spirit or person, or even by an ancestral spirit that does not feel remembered by

its descendants (Podolecka, 2016). While there may be a manifestation of a viral infection or bacteria, the real illness is spiritual and therefore Western medication will have no effect as far as healing the person is concerned. Sangomas also have the ability to explain misfortunes by answering questions such as why the misfortune has befallen a person, family, or community as well as give advice on how to resolve it.

2.7 BECOMING A SANGOMA

In the Xhosa tradition, the term *ukuthwasa,* meaning to “come out” or “be reborn” is used to describe the initiation process when one receives a calling to become a sangoma (Booi, 2004; Ratiba 2015). A person can only become a sangoma if they have received a calling from their ancestors to be trained as a sangoma (Kopytoff, 1971). This fact is confirmed by Morgan and Wieringa (2005) and Ratiba (2015) who agree receiving a calling is not assigned to a person by choice; it is determined by the ancestors. This calling manifests through various signs such as the individual becoming sick, mentally disturbed, or receiving visions and dreams (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Individuals who receive the calling may experience headaches, psychosis, and shoulder and neck complaints among others (Cumes, 2013). These signs cannot be ignored and will intensify until the person accepts the calling and attends the necessary training to become a sangoma (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Expounding on the illness factor as part of the calling a person receives, Ratiba (2015) states once Western medicine fails to heal a person, she or he will quite possibly either choose to engage with a sangoma or, upon the advice of the family to investigate the origin of the “strange illness”, consult a sangoma. If the sangoma diagnoses the illness as the calling, the illness and the symptoms somehow disappear (Cumes, 2013).

Morgan and Wieringa (2005) share the story of Ndlovu who became very sick at the age of 18. Ndlovu experienced severe headaches and had a lot of pain in her body. She was admitted to hospital several times, but simply did not recover. A dream Ndlovu had on a particular day became the enabling factor for her to accept her calling. In this dream, she was stuck in an elevator, and she could not breathe. Finally, a woman in the form of her great-grandmother appeared. Ndlovu, accepting the woman as her ancestor, told her own grandmother about the dream. Her grandmother then took her granddaughter to a prophet who helped Ndlovu to accept her calling.

As explained by Morgan and Wieringa (2005), once a person accepts the calling to become a sangoma, the first thing he or she must do is find a trainer. As mentioned before, the trainer is usually a highly skilled sangoma referred to as a *gobela*, known as a “traditional tutor” in English. The trainer will offer “traditional” education in the form of the transfer of spiritual knowledge (Thornton, 2009). Training comprises various dimensions, e.g., learning to meditate, summon the ancestors at will through the beating of drums, and to “read” bones to detect whether ancestral spirits are offended or satisfied. It also includes ceremonies, rituals, dream interpretation, divination, and the use of herbs and plants (Chinyama, 2017) as well as learning how to grind muthi and use it.

Initiates are comprised of people who unexpectedly arrive on the *gobela’s* doorstep in answer to the calling. Some claim they have experienced fits or depression and know they were being called; others dreamt about the gobela who they were meant to approach (Thornton, 2009). Booi (2004) adds during the training process, the initiate is required to reside with the training sangoma because they must practically learn how to apply the techniques and practices of a sangoma. Initiates wear *amabhayi (*a length of material with traditional prints) and they rub white muthi on their faces and bodies.

The training period lasts for three months and, in some instances, even for years. It depends on the ailment that is being addressed or the activities that need to be completed to fulfil the calling (Ratiba, 2015). On completion of their training, their bodies are painted with red clay until graduation day. On the graduation day, the novice sangomas paint their bodies with white clay in either dots or circles. The body paintings resemble an animal, usually a leopard, and are believed to link the novice sangoma to the ancestor who has bestowed on him or her powers that the novice sangoma now possesses (Mpako, Matike, Ekosse, & Ngole, 2011).

2.8 IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE

It has been established that if a person has a calling to become a sangoma, the training could last between three months and an unknown period of years. This poses a challenge for individuals who receive a calling and are full-time employees. The current labour legislation in SA does not make provision for a special kind of leave for

personnel to attend to the calling of becoming a sangoma. Obviously, attending to this calling would result in the absence of the employee from the workplace. The matter between Kievits Kroon Country Estate (Pty) Ltd (hereafter referred to as Kievits Kroon Country Estate) and Mmoledi and Others (South African Legal Information Institute, 2013) brought the attendance of an ancestral calling from the perspective of the workplace to the fore.

Ms Mmoledi was employed as a Chef de Partie by Kievits Kroon Country Estate that provides conference facilities to clients. In May 2007, Ms Mmoledi approached her manager to request time off to attend a traditional healer course as she was seeing visions of her ancestors that instructed her to become a sangoma. Ms Mmoledi additionally requested that her shift be amended from an afternoon to a morning shift. The change in shift was granted by the employer and the employee was allowed to attend the traditional healer course. In June 2007, Ms Mmoledi approached her employer to request six weeks off from work to complete the course. At that stage, Ms Mmoledi had exhausted all of the annual leave days that had been granted to her. Despite the very busy season being experienced by Kievits Kroon Country Estate, the employer offered Ms Mmoledi one more week of unpaid leave and expected her to return to work on 6 June 2007. Ms Mmoledi declined this offer and submitted a letter from a traditional healer to Kievits Kroon Country Estate management requesting the employee to be excused from work. In the letter it was stated that, under the care of the traditional healer, the employee was attending training as per the ancestral calling. Ms Mmoledi did not arrive for work and the employer charged her for taking unauthorised leave and gross insubordination as she had taken leave without the employer's permission. Ms Mmoledi attended the management's disciplinary hearing and again stated that, if she had not attended the traditional healer course to become a traditional healer, it would have resulted in further illness or even her death. She was found guilty on all charges at the conclusion of the disciplinary hearing and was subsequently dismissed.

Aggrieved by the outcome, the employee, Ms Mmoledi, took the case to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The conciliation meeting was unsuccessful. After arbitration, the Commissioner ruled that the dismissal was unfair. Dissatisfied with the finding, the employer, Kievits Kroon Country Estate,

appealed. The Labour Court, Labour Appeal Court and the Supreme Court of Appeal all ruled against the employer and upheld that the employee's dismissal was unfair. It was ruled that Ms Mmoledi had to be reinstated. The Courts' ruling upheld that employees' cultural beliefs should be considered. In this particular case, the employee's belief that she could die if she did not attend to this calling was a justifiable reason to be absent from work and to not comply with her employer's instructions. The Courts affirmed that an employer should not be expected to tolerate prolonged absence of employees, but also requisitely advised that termination of employment due to incapacity (ill health) could be fair only in certain instances (Werksmans Attorneys, 2014). The Courts acknowledged that this case was unique, and no such case had previously been addressed within the SA legislative framework (Viljoen, 2019).

The way in which a person receives a calling to become a sangoma differs from person to person. When an employee receives an ancestral calling such as in the aforementioned Kievits Kroon Country Estate case, it is a dilemma for the employer as there is currently no legislation to guide employers on how such culture-driven matters must be handled (Phooko & Mnyongani, 2015). The significance of the Kievits Kroon Country Estate case is that, for the now, employers have to be tolerant and negotiate accommodating the cultural beliefs of employees. This begs the question of how organisations are dealing with and accommodating such requests in the current employment landscape in SA.

Section 23 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997) provides guidance in terms of the validity of medical certificates that are acceptable in the employment relationship, e.g., when an employee requests sick leave (Lambrechts, 2012). In SA, a medical certificate must be issued and signed by a medical doctor or person who is registered with a professional health council thus authorised to diagnose and treat patients. Medical doctors in SA are registered with The Health Professions Council of SA (HPCSA). The HPCSA is a statutory body established in terms of the Health Professions Act No. 56 of 1974 (Rules and Regulations) (South Africa, 1974). The Traditional Health Practitioners Act No. 35 of 2004 provides for the establishment of The Traditional Healers Council of SA and allows for traditional healers who are registered with the council to issue medical

certificates as proof of incapacity (South Africa, 2004). The medical certificate must comply with the requirements of a medical certificate issued by a medical practitioner (Labour Net, 2022). Van Niekerk (2019) supports Tshehla's (2015) statement that the standard of training and qualifications required to register as traditional healers in terms of the Traditional Health Practitioners Act is lacking. No clear guidelines exist in terms of (a) creating uniformity and accuracy regarding the qualifications required to become a traditional healer in terms of the Act, and (b) whether they (the traditional healers) are competent to make a diagnosis in terms of the Act. Consequently, employers are uncertain–and rightfully so–of the validity and legality of sick notes issued by traditional healers.

2.9 EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS BELIEFS IN THE WORKPLACE (THROUGH CASE LAW)

In post-apartheid SA muthi is being used in the workplace as a means to cause fear and intimidation according to Ashforth (2005). In fact, there is much evidence in literature that this is a common and widespread phenomenon in different workplace environments in SA. The contributions of Chinguno (2013) and Tshoose (2018) confirming this statement is presented later on in this section. Suffice at this point to state the use of muthi has become an important aspect of the indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace context because, whether expressing it openly or keeping it silent, it affects the lives of many people in the workplace.

In the Black African culture, it is believed that some living people are blessed with a special gift that enables them to communicate with their ancestors–sangomas or diviners are such living people. It is a deeply rooted and inherited belief in many indigenous cultures that deceased ancestors continue to play a role in the lives of the living family members. Individuals and families accept the presence of a long dead elderly in their midst as a normal part of their everyday existence, because the former protects family members from misfortune and pave the way for good fortune. This is to say, if the ancestors are happy with the respect they receive from an individual or a family (Bantjes et al., 2018). The recognition of the ancestors is done through ceremonies, rituals, and by ensuring that the connection between the ancestor and the living world is not broken (Edwards, 2011).

Mangaliso and Damane (2001) share the case of an anonymous company in which the pilfering of a large number of goods was detected. Normal methods used to find the culprits were unsuccessful as were police investigations. When even fingerprints taken of all employees rendered no leads to successful arrests, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) eventually called in the help of a sangoma. The sangoma told the employees that the person who had stolen the goods would die from a spell cast on all employees if he or she did not confess within 24 hours. After eight hours, an employee confessed to the theft. This example confirms black Africans believe in and fear the power of a sangoma.

Chinguno (2013) provides evidence that the use of muthi is an everyday reality for mineworkers. They use muthi and consult with sangomas when seeking employment as well as job security. Sangomas are also consulted to retain energy, as working in a mine requires high levels of endurance. At one of the Lonmin mine shafts, a rock drill operator has an underground section dedicated to him only because of his use of muthi. When he goes on leave, not a single mineworker is willing to work in his area. In fact, his section is closed down otherwise there are accidents, fog, and death. It is rumoured that he wears a band made of the skin of a python which he ties to his waist when on duty. He also sprays all of the equipment with muthi before starting his shift. Production at his shaft is always good with no accidents when he is around.

The respective case studies done by Mangaliso and Damane (2001) and Chinguno (2013) both involved the use of muthi in the workplace. My study was aimed at understanding black Africans' indigenous cultural beliefs and how it affects their overall well-being in the workplace. Thousands of Black African employees in SA have an unfathomable belief in the spiritual bond between their ancestors and sangomas. To illustrate these employees' trust in and reliance on traditional healers and their divinely guided healing practices, I return to Chinguno's (2013) work entitled, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*. This work serves as a valuable example of how the traditional healing practices practised by sangomas can affect black employees and their behaviour and well-being in a workplace.

Chinguno (2013) reports on the massacre that occurred at the Lonmin mine in 2012. Lonmin is a platinum mine located in the Marikana district in the North West province of SA. Striking workers demanded higher wages. A sangoma was consulted to assist

the striking workers. The sangoma conducted some rituals with the miners to ensure they were invincible and strong. The miners believed the muthi provided by the sangoma would protect them from police attacks during the strike. The sangoma instructed the miners to wash themselves with the muthi, abstain from women, and to not turn back when attacking the “enemy” (the police). In the bloody showdown that followed between the miners and the police, 34 mineworkers were shot. All 34 died. A female mine worker confirmed that 80% of the striking miners truly believed the muthi would make them invincible, all-powerful and protect them from the police (Chinguno, 2013). In the same work, the author reflects on Black African miners’ belief that using muthi contributed to a positive outcome for them. At Impala, another platinum mining company also the North West province, 17 000 mineworkers were dismissed. After negotiating with their employer, they were all rehired. The miners attributed their successful rehiring to the intervention of a sangoma and the use of muthi. All miners firmly believed the sangoma’s intervention had played a key role in overturning their dismissals.

From case law, Tshoose (2018) reflects on the case of the *National Sugar Refining and Allied Industries Union on behalf of Mngomezulu and Tongaat Hulett Sugar Ltd (2016) 37 ILD 2441 (BCA)* (hereinafter “National Sugar Refining”). At the workplace of National Sugar Refining, a male employee was dismissed because of serious misconduct. It was alleged that he had used muthi to intimidate the HR manager. The employee challenged the dismissal, and the case was subsequently referred to the Bargaining Council. When no resolution could be reached, the case was referred for arbitration. During the arbitration, various other employees were called to give evidence. The general manager and the HR manager testified on the strained relationship between the employee and the HR manager. Prior altercations and incidents between the two parties were referred to. The employee received a final written warning after he had been found guilty of assaulting, threatening, and being insubordinate to a member of management, being the HR Manager. Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) footage was then disclosed which clearly showed the employee placing a black gummy substance on the door and rear wheel of the HR manager’s car. The HR manager was convinced that the substance was muthi and was placed there with the intent to threaten and intimidate her. National Sugar Refining obtained the opinion of a sangoma, who testified that the substance was indeed muthi and was

used with the intention to harm the HR manager. During the arbitration, the dismissal was upheld. The Commissioner from the CCMA declared that witchcraft has an unequivocally negative influence on the lives of black Africans; it causes fear in the Black African community as a whole. While recognising the belief of black Africans in ancestors and muthi, the Commissioner emphasised the act of using muthi with the intent to harm others (in this case a fellow employee) is regarded as misconduct, even if the muthi failed to "work". Concluding that the employee used the muthi intentionally to intimidate the HR manager, the Commissioner reiterated that such conduct cannot be tolerated in the workplace.

The Constitution (South Africa, 1996) recognises that SA "belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity" (Prinsloo & Huysamen, 2018). According to The Constitution, it is imperative that the diverse cultures and religions of the people of SA remains protected. This is achieved by upholding The Constitution wherein it is clearly stated no person may be discriminated against directly or indirectly on several grounds, including culture and religion. Legislation to protect the diversity of individuals by prohibiting unfair dismissal and unfair labour practices based on religion, culture, and race does exist in SA (Yakoob, 2017).

South African courts are willing to allow reasonable accommodation of people based on their cultural and religious principles; however, it can also be denied if in conflict with the law itself. An example of this is the case of *Prince v. the President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope.* At the time, cannabis use was still prohibited in SA. In this case, Prince was a practising Rastafarian who used cannabis as part of the Rastafarian culture. He also wanted to be admitted as an attorney to the Cape Law Society. The Cape Law Society rejected his application as it requires those admitted to be a "fit and proper" person. Prince did not qualify as such owing to previous convictions of being in possession of cannabis. It is evident from this case that indigenous cultural beliefs and the modern day workplace can and do clash – but to what extent is this happening? This is what needed to be investigated in the current study.

Lambrechts (2012) cites the case between *Fairy Tales Boutique t/a Baby City Centurion v. CCMA and others* in which the employee did not arrive at work for a scheduled stocktaking. Instead, she had opted to attend the funeral of her mother-in-

law. The employee was dismissed on grounds of gross insubordination as she had no family responsibility leave left, and was instructed by her employer to attend the stocktaking. The case was referred to the CCMA and the Labour Court. On review, both legal institutions indicated that the dismissal was unfair as the employer failed to take into consideration the cultural practices of black employees as well as the family circumstances of the employee. The ruling indicated that the employee had to deal with a family emergency, namely that her mother-in-law had passed away. As per the Black African custom, the employee was required to make the arrangements for the funeral. The Labour Court also found that the employer was not inconvenienced by the absence of the employee during the stocktaking because the employer could have made alternative arrangements.

The validity of a note from a traditional healer was brought into the fore in the case of *Vincent Sithole v. Corporate Junction (Pty) Ltd* (Lambrechts, 2012). The employee was absent from the beginning of March until the end of April 2010. Enquiring about the particular employee's whereabouts, the company's Personal Assistant (PA) was told the employee was ill. When the employee failed to return to work, a letter was issued to the employee advising him to return to work within seven days. If he did not return, he would be seen as an absconder and dismissed with immediate effect. The letter sent to the employee was dated 24 March 2010. The employee only returned to work on 26 April 2010 and produced a medical certificate from a traditional healer. Rumours had started among other employees at *Corporate Junction (Pty) Ltd* implying that the said employee was not ill, but was doing temporary work for a different company. The PA launched an investigation into the origin of the certificate from the traditional healer who finally admitted the employee was never hospitalised. Additionally, proof was provided showing that the employee did indeed receive payment from another company during his period of absence from *Corporate Junction (Pty) Ltd.* The employer found that the medical certificate was questionable and rejected it as proof of the employee's absence. The Labour Court ruled that the dismissal was an appropriate action considering the circumstances of the case.

Carrim (2015) also refers to the case of *Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (South Africa) (PPWAWU) v. Nampak Corrugated Containers ((1998) 3LLD 48 (CCMA))*. An employee was dismissed after he had been absent without leave for 14

days and without any notification to the employer. The employee said he had gone to a traditional healer in a rural area and intended to be there for one week. However, the traditional healer requested the employee to stay longer, and the employee had no means to contact the employer. Furthermore, the employee stated he had a long-term drinking problem which was now resolved. The Commissioner explained that in a country like SA, diseases and illnesses are not limited to treatment through Western medicine. The employee was reinstated.

All the aforementioned cases validate employers have had to litigate regarding employee's cultural beliefs in the past. What had to be explored was how organisations deal with such inherent cultural beliefs of Black African employees in the modern workplace, and what accommodations can be made before any litigation takes place.

2.10 WEARING OF ISIPHANDLA

Black Africans–male or female–who wear isiphandla, indicate they ascribe to the belief that wearing it connects them with their ancestors, their family, and their customs. They see isiphandla as a source of hope, and wearing it gives them a sense of security, respect, and pride (Makunga, Thwala & Edwards, 2011). The isiphandla, which is a piece of skin from a cow or goat hide, is attached to the wrists or ankles, or both. Isiphandla is worn after performing a spiritual sacrifice or to celebrate a joyous occasion. For example, when a baby is born, a goat is slaughtered for the ceremony. The wearing of the isiphandla by the newborn symbolizes that she or he is fully accepted as a member of the family. When families are extended through marriage, the bride has to be introduced to the ancestors and therefore she wears isiphandla. The bile of the slaughtered animal is then smeared on her head, over her body, joints and feet to improve and strengthen her and the family's ties with the ancestors (Makunga et al., 2011). When a person slaughters an animal such as a chicken, goat, or cow and the animal's blood seals the bond between the ancestors and the individual. Wearing isiphandla also indicates to the community that one has performed a ritual for the ancestors (Makunga et al., 2011).

Christian missionaries who came to South Africa regarded African culture and customs in a negative manner and even went to the extent of regarding the Zulu culture as a sin (Masondo, 2018). Masondo (2018) adds black Africans faced the possibility of

being expelled from the community if they did not abandon their traditional customs which led to some performing their rituals in secrecy. As a result of this stereotyping, it is posited that Black African individuals may have tried to hide the isiphandla during the tumultuous and racist colonial and apartheid eras in the country. However, with the advent of democracy in SA, such stereotypes are believed to have dissipated because of the greater tolerance and respect for diversity enshrined in SA's new post-apartheid Constitution of 1996.

Several articles relating to the wearing of isiphandla in the school and military environments were found in literature. For example, wearing isiphandla has led to the suspension of learners who wear it; in other instances, wearing isiphandla caused contentions in schools resulting in legal intervention (Bhana, 1994; De Waal, Mestry & Russo, 2011; Hodgson, 2017; Schunke, 2015; Settler, 2013). Interestingly, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) also witnessed an increase in tensions as a result of the changes in the racial, language, ethnic, and gender profile of the SANDF members which became more diverse (Heinecken, 2009).

Mashike (2007) states between 1994 and 2004, the culture of the army in SA was very much an Afrikaner Christian military culture. Because many of the military traditions had British origins, some army members found it difficult to accommodate the differences in ethnicity and cultures in the new democratic dispensation. Black African members wearing traditional decorations such as "sangoma bracelets" (isiphandla) felt their culture was not accommodated in the SANDF culture (Heinecken, 2009, pp. 39-40). In an effort to assist transformation and change in the SANDF, the Minister of Defence tasked the Setai Commission to provide recommendations on how to improve the state of affairs in the SANDF. Typical challenges expressed by Black African army members related to disrespecting the importance of allowing cultural ceremonies, insufficient leave to attend funerals of extended family members, and their need to consult with traditional healers as well as the importance of communicating with their ancestors (Setai Commission, 2001).

As a step towards better accommodation, the dress code policy of the SANDF was revised to include religious adornments such as the isiphandla and the Laskshimi string (band of red cotton), the allowance of a beard or moustache (to accommodate Muslim, Jewish and Shembe beliefs), the wearing of a fez (by Muslim men) and the

allowance to wear a button or band to indicate that one is in mourning (Heinecken, 2009). Furthermore, members of the SANDF were granted five days of 'special responsibility' leave to attend funerals. Many young black Africans in the SANDF who adopt a Westernised value system find themselves in a conflicting situation in terms of their value system versus their traditional culture. This is especially troublesome when it comes to conforming to, e.g., traditional rituals and ceremonies such as circumcision, showing respect for elders and acceptance of the role of traditional healers (Heinecken, 2009).

From a workplace perspective, the multinational retail company Woolworths made headlines in 2020 when it was reported that Ms Mathapelo Nkopane was suspended for wearing isiphandla after having engaged in an ancestral ceremony. Ms Nkopane said that she had requested and was granted approval from her line manager to wear isiphandla as long as it was covered. She had already been wearing the isiphandla to work for a period of 10 months. A bakery specialist advised managers of Woolworths to move Ms Nkopane to another department until the isiphandla fell off. Ms Nkopane was requested by the store's management to write a statement explaining why she wore isiphandla. She was further required to explain who had given her permission to wear it. Ms Nkopane did this as requested. She was then advised that she was under investigation and was subsequently suspended. Woolworths management later stated Ms Nkopane had not been suspended because of wearing the isiphandla, but that there was another matter that led to her suspension (News 24, 2020). Ms Nkopane was called into a meeting with her line manager who, she believes, discriminated against her by asking inappropriate questions about why she wore isiphandla. This left her feeling humiliated (Mntambo & Motloung, 2020). Clearly, further in-depth studies are necessary to address existing perceptions towards wearing isiphandla in the workplace and how belief and religiosity issues need to be – or can be – accommodated in the workplace.

2.11 WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Many corporates, companies, and businesses are currently investing money in programmes that promote workplace diversity (Scarborough, 2017). The benefits derived from such investments include better economic performance, and a reduction in litigation cases as a consequence of unintentional discrimination caused by

ignorance or misunderstanding of the religious beliefs that black Africans bring to the workplace. Workplace diversity awareness can take on many forms such as diversity training and mentorship programmes.

According to Scarborough, Lambouths III, and Holbrook (2019), support for workplace diversity policies differs among employed people because of the presence presented by different variables such as race, gender, and minority populations. The authors' findings in a study conducted on developing workplace policies that need to accommodate cultural diversities, including race and religion, indicated that diversity policies were primarily supported more by blacks, women and Latinos than whites and men. Indeed, less support for diversity policies was shown if they were positioned as a means to increase diversity as opposed to having a more meaningful objective such as to address discrimination (Scarborough et al., 2019). Using the glass ceiling metaphor to describe invisible barriers to advancement in the workplace, Pierre (2019) argues that "invisible barriers" to advancement continue to block women and minority groups from advancement in the workplace. Moreover, the author challenges the view that black females face a concrete wall and not a glass ceiling owing to increasing challenges. Within the South African context, with black Africans being 78.9% of the economically active population but with only 15.2% of black Africans in senior management positions (City Press, 2020), it begs the question as to whether black Africans too face a glass ceiling within the workplace. Furthermore, black Africans are marginalized in the private sector due to the existence of race hierarchies whereby white males and females occupy senior and top management positions (Carrim, 2021).

2.12 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Historically, psychological theories originated in the Western world and have been believed to be universal theories in psychological research for the biggest part of the last three centuries. But, the realities of contemporary everyday life differ significantly from Western life in the 1800s. For this reason, Western theories are perceived as biased because they have very little relevance to the realities of the modern world (Kim et al., 2006; Matoane, 2012). For decades, researchers have been questioning the use of Western psychology in non-Western contexts. This endless search eventually led to the genesis of Indigenous Psychology in the 1970s (Hwang, 2004). Indigenous

Psychology emphasises the role that culture plays in moulding human behaviour; it is the study of human behaviour and thinking within the context of one's culture (Nuzulia & Utami, 2014).

With its emergence in the 1970s, Indigenous Psychology was distinctly advocated in non-Western countries like Mexico, Korea, Japan, and the Philippines (Hwang, 2004). By 2001, the Indigenous Psychology movement obtained traction, noting an increased level of attention from mainstream psychologists (Shiraev & Levy, 2001). In the opinion of Shiraev and Levy (2001), Western research paradigms are inadequate when trying to understand people in non-Western countries. Indigenous Psychology questions the universality of psychological theories that currently exist, and attempts to uncover universalities from a social, cultural, and ecological context (Yang, 2000). According to Kim et al. (2006), Indigenous Psychology values beliefs and meanings that are assigned to the different contexts mentioned by Yang (2000).

It is evident that general psychological principles are objective and differentiated by excluding aspects of human functioning that differs from person to person. Indigenous Psychology does not disregard subjective accounts of individuals in understanding human behaviour. Hermans and Kempen (1998) indicate that culture is a moving concept because it changes over time; it also becomes difficult to distinguish in a globalised society. On a micro-level, employees are seen as a whole being and it is important to understand what beliefs they bring to the workplace. I explored the following theories to serve as background for this study: social exchange theory; social identity theory; identity work; spillover theory, and stigma theory. The purpose of these theories is to provide a conceptual understanding and a framework on which to coduct the research and the analysis of the data.

2.12.1 Social exchange theory

In today's cross-cultural workplace the workforce is characterised by drastically differing historical, political, cultural, and social backgrounds and traditions. When these myriad differences come together in one environment, communication and collaborative interaction become extremely difficult and challenging. Communication involves verbal, written, and body language interaction between the employee and employer (and vice versa) as well as among the workforce, and the workplace

environment influences this process (Anoosheh, Zarkhah, Faghihzadeh, & Vaismoradi, 2009). Negotiating high quality exchange in workplace relationships and dealing with unexpected challenges such as the equal-status belief system across traditional sociocultural differences, is complicated–but critical.

An example of such high-quality exchange is the study conducted by Haar and Brougham., (2013) who explored the role of workplace cultural well-being and career satisfaction of the Maori people. Acknowledging the Maori's cultural well-being resulted in open and responsive negotiations ("high quality") from both sides–between employer and employee and vice versa. This stemmed from the indigenous employees' feelings that their employers and workplaces showed respect for their cultural beliefs. Ngwenya (2014) states one of the key factors to retaining employees sits with the capability of the organisation to support employees through understanding what motivates the latter. From this end, employees should feel that organisations display a good, positive attitude towards them (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, & Rhodes, 2002). Ngwenya (2014) further states the exchange relationship between the employer and the employee is beyond resources such as money or services. It also involves the exchanges of social emotional resources such as respect, approval, integrity, open communication, and support. Employees who actually feel that the organisation does not offer high or sufficient support will have a low level of obligation towards the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Also, employees scrutinize the organisational actions towards them, e.g., human resources practices and the trustworthiness of management as being indicative of the commitment that the organisation has towards the employee (Ngwenya, 2014). If human resources policies and practices offer care and respect to employees, and take into account the individual needs of employees, it will lead to employees feeling better supported by the organisation. The social exchange theory was applied to help understand how Black African employees' function in the workplace when their cultural and ethnic beliefs are acknowledged and taken into account.

2.12.2 Social identity theory

In trying to understand workplace diversity, the pivotal role that identity plays in the larger societal context cannot be ignored. In the current study, great emphasis was placed on cultural identity. According to Nkomo and Cox (1996, p. 89), the "concept of

identity appears to be at the core of understanding diversity in organizations." The link between diversity management and social identity theory is that diversity relates to how we perceive and treat people's differences. The identity theory refers to constructions of how we perceive ourselves and others. Social identity is formed from the groups, statuses, and categories that an individual is socially recognised as being a part of (Trepte, 2013) and is not simply a personal construction (Carrim, 2016b).

The social identity theory was introduced in the 1970s by Tajfel and Turner who asserted it is critical to understand how individuals perceive themselves as part of particular groups (Holck, Muhr, & Villeseche, 2016). There is also the existence of collective and personal identities. According to Stets and Serpe (2013), collective identities refer to individuals that form a social group and are attached to the membership of that group. In the organisational context, collective identities explain the formation of inclusion and exclusion that results from in-groups and out-groups (Holck et al., 2016). Most of the research on in-group and out-group employees in the workplace are focussed on employees who are targets of gossip (Carrim, 2016a; Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009); gays and lesbians (Craig & Richeson, 2014); older employees (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021; Weber, Angerer, & Müller, 2019); minority employees (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Owuamalam, & Zagefka, 2014); and high status versus low status occupational groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019).

Every individual is made up of different social identities which are then adapted to suit the environments that they exist in, e.g., family, church, or the workplace (Olckers, van Zyl, & van der Vaart, 2017). A person may belong to many social groups during his or her lifespan and, according to the social identity theory, the individual's identity is a reflection of his or her main social groups (Olckers et al., 2017). For example, people who believe that their ethnicity is their main social group will determine which actions and beliefs to uphold. Individuals have a choice as to whether they will adhere to or ignore the rules of their social group, and they will decide if they will apply these rules in any new environment. A person can also have multiple social groups such as identifying as Muslim, black, and being a woman.

Acculturation takes place when an employee makes an attempt to adapt to her or his company's organisational culture. However, when the employee takes beliefs from her or his identity into the organisational culture, this is called enculturation. This occurs,

e.g., when an employee has such a strong social affiliation towards her or his religion or cultural group, she or he would rather integrate those values into the workplace instead of embracing the existing values of the workplace (Jenkins, 2014; Olckers et al., 2017).

Discrimination is another element that can have an impact on employees with diverse indigenous beliefs. Past research studies indicate that diverse groups such as gay and lesbian people in the workplace experienced discrimination for disclosing their orientation. Elements of this discrimination include job denial, job loss, diminished mobility as well as violence and limited career choices (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Previous research studies also focussed on race discrimination in the workplace (Deitch, et al., 2003). It was found that black people experienced daily discrimination which resulted in negative personal outcomes ("poor health"). It also made them feel less integrated by occupying "token" positions, i.e., positions granted to fulfil an imbalance that relates to race or gender, for example. Black people were found to withdraw from certain domains in the workplace to safeguard their mental health against discrimination. Discrimination related to gender is also an ongoing topic. Approximately 42% of women in America indicated that they had experienced discrimination based on their gender. Such discrimination was manifested in a lower salary, less support from supervisors, and being denied promotion opportunities (Parker & Funk, 2017). In a recent study conducted by Chen (2018), it was found that gender discrimination is quite prevalent in Chinese workplaces in that they obtain fewer working opportunities, are treated unequally, and receive a lower salary.

Several research studies explored the notion that a black woman's identity is linked to her hair (Dawson, Karl, & Peluchette, 2019; Oyedemi, 2016), or to various dimensions of black culture and life (Oyedemi, 2016). Natural black hair has been linked to bias. Black women with black hair are perceived to be less competent and subjected to negative stereotypes (Dawson et al., 2019). In fact, an employee with Afrocentric hair is not only perceived to be less professional, but also expected to be less successful than those with Eurocentric hair (Opie & Phillips, 2015). As inconceivable as it may seem, black women do experience pressure in the workplace to conform to expectations of what is deemed appropriate owing to their genetically inherited hair type. Emerson and Murphy (2014) note that discrimination continues to concern

people of colour. Consequently, ethnic and racial minorities seem to be less successful in their jobs. The reason being that their focus on doing their work is diverted because of their concern as to whether they will be accepted or not by others in the workplace.

The effect of the experience of discrimination could impact Black African employees' feelings that they belong in the workplace and that they feel included in the workplace. The question remains as to whether Black African employees in SA feel that their indigenous cultural beliefs lead to them experiencing intolerance and discrimination in the workplace. This begs another question: Do black Africans portray their black identities in the SA workplace?

2.12.3 Identity work

Identity work is another concept highlighted in the current study. Identity work is described as the activities that an individual engages in to create, present, and sustain a personal identity that is congruent with the self-concept (Snow & Anderson, 1987). In agreement, Koerner (2014) states identity work refers to the activities that individuals engage in to create, preserve, repair, or strengthen their identity. In the work environment, identity work has played a key role in creating professional identities, experimenting with new identities, taking on new roles, and even recovering from trauma such as workplace bullying (Koerner, 2014). Identity work is used to solve incongruence in personal and organisational identities. Stigmatised individuals engage in identity work that includes selective disclosure, actively trying to change others' perceptions, and continuously working and reworking their identities to achieve a sense of coherence (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Trauma identity work occurs if there is a need to repair one's image or escape negative judgements from others.

Srinivas (2013) conducted a research study to understand how marginalised groups had learnt to become professional managers. Prakash Tandon was the first Indian CEO of *Lever Brothers, India* and faced many challenges relating to racial exclusion. As a result of Colonialism in India, Mr Tandon was subjected to work isolation and differential treatment that he simply had to tolerate. However, he employed strategies to endure, appear loyal, and not show any dissatisfaction so that he could succeed (Srinivas, 2013). Carrim (2020) conducted a study on the identity work of employees during the post-acquisition integration of a company. The study was significant in that

it centred on the interaction between, e.g., companies having a different culture or difficulties of employees identifying with the new firm's culture. The findings of the study showed that managers and administrative staff engaged extensively in identity work as they had been committed to the organisation before the acquisition. However, fears about job security post-acquisition resulted in decreased commitment and identification with the new firm. It signifies engagement in identity work, i.e., to be part of the organisation and then consider leaving it when loyalty decreases. Whether in an acquisition process or not, it is evident that the local cultures must be taken into account as they intersect with corporate identities.

Identity work is constantly striving for stability in one's opinion of oneself. Identity work was considered of great importance in the current study as it relates directly to the study topic: To understand whether employees negotiate their personal identities to conceal their indigenous cultural beliefs, and whether they engage in actions to repair their identities to prevent stigma.

The uniqueness of my study was its focus on the identity work of employees who strongly portray their indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace, and whether they experience identity threat or stigma as a result of sharing their indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace.

2.12.4 Spillover theory

Studies from which the spillover theory emerged concerned the recognition that individuals carry their life experiences into the workplace thus indicating that our personal lives and beliefs have an impact on the workplace. Such studies subsequently resulted in the emergence of the "spillover theory" coined in 1966 by Hulin (Ragins, Gonzalez, Ehrhardt, & Singh, 2012). Work plays a pivotal role in forming one's concept of the "self". It affects the quality of our lives not only at work but at home as well (Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014).

The spillover theory is a framework applied to quality-of-life studies and pertains to vertical spillover as well as horizonal spillover. Vertical spillover indicates that, if one experiences satisfaction in one area of life, e.g., spiritual well-being, then this feeling of satisfaction will influence overall life satisfaction. In horizontal spillover, if one

experiences satisfaction in only one of life's domains, it will influence satisfaction in other life domains. For example, an individual's personal spiritual life will "spill over" into one's work life thus leading to satisfaction. This is as a result of spirituality bringing meaning to one's work (Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008). Studies representative of the spillover theory focus on spillover in the sense of community, family, and spiritual beliefs. In a study conducted with a sample of 165 adults in Malaysia, it was found that employees who had a higher individual spiritual experience showed a lower incidence of deviant workplace behaviour. Deviant workplace behaviour is typically manifested in working slowly, damaging company property, and abusing sick leave (Abdul Rahman, Thaheer, Hashim, Shabudin, & Abdul Wahab, 2014). Applied to the context of this study, the question that needed an answer was whether employees' indigenous cultural beliefs practised in their homes and communities spill over into the workplace.

2.12.5 Stigma theory

The aim with the current study was to explore the topic in the context of the stigma theory as well as an identity perspective to understand whether individuals are stigmatised based on their indigenous beliefs and perceptions towards muthi, and how they manifest these beliefs in the workplace setting. In 1963, Goffman defined "stigma" as "an attribute that is discrediting and that reduces a person from a whole to tainted version which does not allow full social acceptance" (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Goffman added that stigma is a discrepancy between how a person is characterised by society, and the attributes that they actually possess (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Crocker, Major and Steele (1998) expand on Goffman's definition of stigma by pointing out that it is an "objective" attribute or feature that conveys a social identity which is devalued within the social context. The contribution Crocker et al. (1998) made to define stigma, makes sense. Stigma indeed results in a devalued social identity because it is an attribute that is devaluing and not necessarily the person who is stigmatised. The effect of stigma on individuals can result in the loss of jobs, social isolation, exclusion, and the loss of professional networking opportunities (Reece, 2016), and poor self-esteem as well as poor mental and physical health (Yang et al., 2007). Newheiser and Barreto (2015) posit it is possible that, if a person possesses a concealable stigmatised identity, he or she may try to hide this identity from others to

avoid bias. While it may be a strategy that allows for acceptance within a social context, a concealed stigmatised identity actually results in social rejection as well as a lowered sense of belonging. According to the stigma theory, people from a specific culture agree on what characteristics may be regarded as stigmatising. Such a “group culture” may result in workplace discrimination thereby concealing these characteristics (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005).

Over the last decade, workplace stigma has generated wide interest among social, educational, communication, and economic and management sciences researchers. Dougherty, Rick and Moore (2017) conducted communication research on stigma and social class. They found that unemployed people in an upper-class category were viewed more positively than those in a lower-class category. Unemployed lower class category people were perceived as being lazy and having made bad choices while the unemployed in an upper-class category were viewed more positively. The research study by Carlström, Ek and Gabrielsson (2021) centred on experiences of transgender individuals and their interaction with health care professionals. It was found that the way in which health care professionals address or treat transgender individuals can have an impact on the dignity of transgender individuals. Subsequently, the possibility was posited that transgender individuals will avoid general health care or certain procedures if health care professionals treat them negatively. Meisenbach and Hutchins (2020) researched stigma related to occupation-specific jobs called “dirty work”. Dirty work refers to work that is viewed negatively owing to its contaminating nature, e.g., people who handle trash. As COVID-19 spread across the USA, stigma and discrimination against Chinese and other Asian individuals increased radically (Gardner, Briggs, & Ryan, 2021). As the number of hate crimes committed against Asians increased (Margolin, 2022), so did workplace prejudice whereby individuals distanced themselves from Asian workers (Gardner et al., 2021).

Clearly, indigenous cultural beliefs is not visible neither is it publicised. I envisaged that this study would fill a particular unseeable but an intense and emotive gap felt by black Africans in the workplace. Understanding the barriers that inhibit black Africans from being open and sharing their indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace is critical for their health and well-being. It is my belief that this study will assist to eliminate existing sociocultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations thereby contributing

to creating a better place of work where individuals can flourish and business enterprises will experience growth.

2.13 CONCLUSION

This marks the end of the literature review. It was important to give context to the South African landscape and the different facets which constitute the indigenous beliefs of black Africans, such as traditional healing and belief in the ancestors. These beliefs contribute to the diversity that exists within the South African population. It is evident, from the case law cited, that indigenous beliefs do pose challenges within the workplace and that accommodation of minority cultures can lead to better organisational outcomes. Furthermore, the theoretical background was important to share, as it is the foundation of this study. I will expand on the research methodology in Chapter 3. Information will be shared regarding the methods employed to determine the research design and to maintain ethical integrity and trustworthiness in the qualitative research project.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the field of research, the general purpose of conducting a scientific investigation is to find answers to questions to solve problems (Kumar, 2011, p. 7). In this chapter the research design and methods adopted to find answers to the research questions are presented and discussed in detail. Ethics forms an essential part of research studies. Despite COVID-19, I wanted to complete my study project and was sure I would be able to fulfil the ethical obligations required. I therefore paid special attention to stay within the boundaries of conducting ethical research. The ethical considerations adhered to in the study are recounted in detail in this chapter.

Immersing myself in a critical evaluation of previously written academic sources (books, articles, reviews and dissertations) relevant to my study, I came to realise that, by posing a research question (or questions) and coming to a conclusion about it, *something* needs to be done to come to that conclusion. That "something" is for the researcher to "give careful thought to your method [and design] before you start your research and your writing" as advised by Hofstee (2009, p. 107).

Entertaining Kothari's (2004) idea that scientific investigation is a "form of art", Kumar's (2011, p. 5) interpretation of it is that in both areas of scientific investigation and arts, a *process* has to be applied. Artists can only "make art" by following a *process*. At the core, both researchers and artists are "observers" and "interpreters" of what is happening in the world around them. They endeavour to transform the "unknown" into the "known" in an artistic or scientific way. The *process* that is followed during the execution of scientific research is embedded in the design and methodology which paves the way to find answers to research questions (Kumar, 2011, p. 23). To ensure answers are authentic, reliable and unbiased, it is important that the conventional expectations of scientific research, including ethical principles, are constantly born in mind during the research *process*. Carrim (2012, p. 148) recognises Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) stance that "art as well as science" are merged in "the analytic product and *process* [emphasis added]" embedded in the grounded theory method of data analysis.

3.2 INFLUENCE OF THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic by the end of January 2020 (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020), it had an impact on my research methodology. However, it was apparent that my situation was not unique. Gabrielle (2021) refers to studies by postgraduates, among others, those of Chenneville and Schwartz-Mette (2020) and Thompson (2020) (as cited in Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC), 2020, p. S151), in which the effects of the pandemic influenced the postgraduates. These students had to adopt innovative strategies and find other ways to adapt to a very new way of doing and completing their research studies: “Recent studies have shown that many graduate students have faced new barriers in regards to completing research due to the COVID limitations, rules and restrictions of conducting in-person research studies.” (Gabrielle, 2021, p. 3). The pandemic not only affected students’ and postgraduates’ situation, but also that of colleges and universities “through limited in-person activities, with repeated disruptions to research and training” (Government of Canada as cited in Gabrielle, 2021, p. 3). The areas of research studies befuddled most by the pandemic were, in no particular order, ethics, access to online literature sources in an academic library, methodology (specifically participant selection and data collection), and completing work on time (Boufenchoucha & Herry Chandra, 2021; Gabrielle, 2021; Thompson, 2020).

Conversely, in my case the pandemic did not influence the methodological progress of my study too much. The research proposal was approved during the pandemic. South Africa was on level 4 lockdown when I started with my data collection process. Level 4 lockdown in terms of the COVID-19 regulations placed restrictions on the movement of people between 21:00 to 4:00, except in the case of an emergency or if one was an essential worker. Travel out of one’s province, for leisure, was also restricted. Schools remained closed (except for early childhood development centres) and social and religious gatherings were prohibited (Business Tech, 2021). It was convenient for the participants and me to do the interviews virtually, in the evenings or over weekends using Zoom or Microsoft Teams. As a result of the lockdown restrictions, majority of the participants were working from home and it was convenient

for them to be interviewed during these times. Also, the participants and I did not incur any costs related to travelling, as we did not meet at a common venue.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm or worldview is “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17) Paradigms provide insights into the beliefs that researchers bring to qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher, I needed an in-depth understanding of existing paradigms to decide which would be most applicable to the current study. For the purpose of this study, I reviewed the positivist, interpretivist, and critical theory paradigms.

3.3.1 Positivist paradigm

According to the positivist paradigm, reality exists independent of humans (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The researcher works with the observable reality and then produces generalisations which are based on the data purely and are not influenced by human interpretation (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The most influential critique of positivism is that it results in unbiased observation which does not necessarily give sufficient understanding of the situation that is being studied (Lamotta, 2017). This type of approach is influenced by empirical data collection and cause and effect relationships (Creswell, 2007). Associations that might be observed in a laboratory setting may be very different when we consider the external factors to the phenomena being studied. Therefore, the positivist approach falls short when studying individuals and social phenomena (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Furthermore, positivists do not take into account that differences in individuals based on race, culture, religion, and other historical contexts may exist (Carrim, 2012). The positivist approach did not suit the current study because understanding the experiences of black Africans in the South African workplace against the backdrop of their culture, religion, and race was crucial to the study.

3.3.2 Critical theory paradigm

The focus of critical theory is that reality does exist, but this reality is influenced or shaped by other factors that may be cultural, gender, ethnic, or religious (Abdul

Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Critical theorists aim to explain what is wrong with the current social reality, identify different actions to change it, and then propose solutions for change (Asghar, 2013). Furthermore, critical theory does not only intend to highlight social injustices, but is aimed at creating equality and justice for all (Asghar, 2013).

Critical theory regards knowledge as subjective since our viewpoint depends on our own circumstances. Furthermore, this theory focusses on understanding what has caused oppression or injustice in the lives of individuals, and how the problems experienced can be remedied (Carrim, 2012). Creswell (2007) indicates that critical theorists will engage to understand the historical context of a situation to understand social struggles, alienation, and domination and only then find new possibilities after understanding this context. The aim of this study was not for me, as the researcher, to be an advocate of change for the participants. For this reason, the critical theory paradigm was deemed not appropriate for the study purpose.

3.3.3 Interpretivist paradigm

Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) indicate that interpretivism was developed as a consequence of the criticism of the positivist paradigm. Positivism has one reality and focuses more on pure data and facts, without being influenced by interpretations through human bias. Interpretivism considers different cultures and circumstances that lead to different social realities being constructed, and this is where richness of the data comes from (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Carcary, 2009). In addition, social reality in the interpretivist paradigm is influenced by our senses and created by the participants studied; it is not discovered by the researcher through law-like rules (Snape & Spencer, 2003). According to Carcary (2009), there is an external reality that refers to the actual event in the physical world and then there are internal realities– the unique and subjective experience of each individual in the research study–that have to be taken into consideration. According to Creswell (2007), the participants in an interpretivist approach are either underrepresented in society or come from marginalised groups in the form of gender, race, class, or religion and/or an intersection between these differences.

The interpretivist paradigm pays focus to understanding why certain issues stand. These issues may be seen as a disadvantage or exclude individuals or groups of people based on racism, gender inequality, and inequity in society (Creswell, 2007). A key component of this paradigm is that the researcher does not intend to further marginalise participants, but focusses on the stories shared by them; in other words, the narrative they bring to the table. The outcome attributed to the interpretivist paradigm is its aim to create awareness of social justice. Such awareness can lead to taking definitive steps to encourage action or reform (Creswell, 2007). Typically, the aim of the interpretivist researcher is to understand the interpretations of the participants on the phenomenon they “currently” experience within their “current” context at the “current” time (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This approach is also inductive in that the researcher attempts to discover patterns in the raw data to develop further themes and then generate a theory (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Data collection methodologies include open-ended interviews, field notes, and informal conversations.

Since I wanted to understand the experiences of black Africans and their perceptions of their indigenous beliefs and its accommodation in the South African workplace, it would be difficult to place into context their experiences without understanding their thoughts and feelings and considering it individually within the context of their family structure and upbringing in general. I therefore chose an interpretivist approach.

3.3.4 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Maree, 2007). Reality includes names, concepts, and labels that form part of social as well as historical creations. These realities are used to make sense of the world we live in. My intent with the current study was to attain a deep understanding of the reality of black Africans as they navigate their indigenous cultural beliefs and the workplace in the formal work environment of a country as culturally diverse as SA. For the purposes of this study, I was able to learn much about the experiences of black Africans and how they negotiate their identities from an ethnic, cultural, and religious perspective in the workplace.

Epistemology refers to how knowledge is acquired about a phenomenon from the researcher's view of the world (Carrim, 2012). By adopting an interpretive paradigm, it was ensured that the researcher and participants would jointly create meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I wanted to understand the subjective and socially constructive meanings that participants associated with the topic being studied. I was fully aware that the experience of each participant would indeed not be the same; hence, multiple realities would be forthcoming. I was also aware that individuals construct their experiences through different means such as their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings as confirmed by Charmaz (1996). By adopting an interpretivist approach, this allowed for the collection of rich data.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the backbone of a research study. It is an extensive presentation or overall plan that guides the data collection and analysis used in the research process (Saunders et al., 2012). The purpose of the research design is to direct the researcher to find answers to the research questions. For this reason, the design contains clear objectives, exacting how the researcher collects the data and addresses ethical issues (Babbie & Mouton, 2006; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). My aim was to explore the indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace focussing on why certain events occur and the factors that drive it.

The first decision I had to make was to choose a research approach that would suit the aim of my study best. I chose a grounded theory approach. Creswell (2007, pp. 62-63) states "the intent with a grounded theory approach is to move beyond description and to *generate or discover a theory* [own emphasis], an abstract or analytical schema of a process". Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest the term "process" in the grounded theory approach relate to action or interaction that is grounded (meaning generated from) and shaped from the input of "a large group of participants who have experienced the process", action or interaction (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the researcher provides a theory or an explanation.

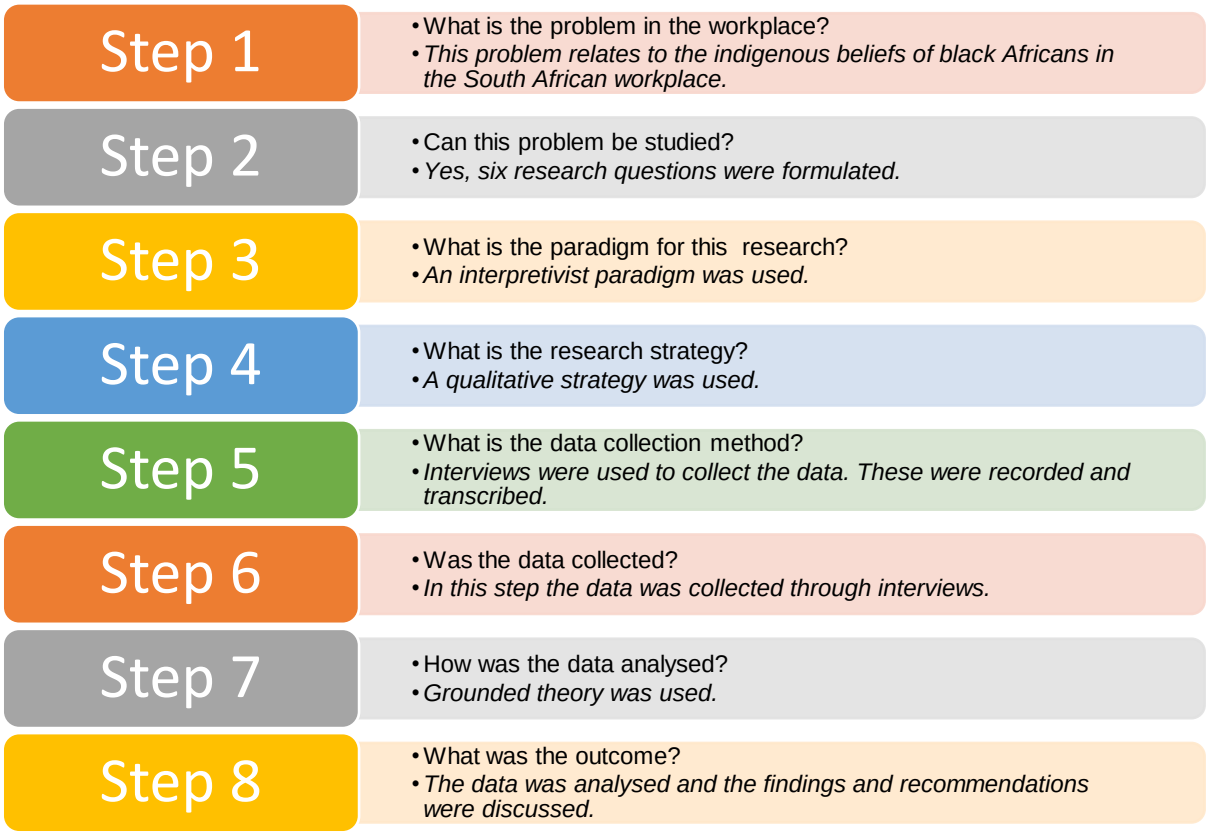
The qualitative data collection method is especially fruitful when not much is known about the phenomenon being investigated (Gray, 2016, p. 36). I reasoned that using

a qualitative strategy embedded in the interpretive paradigm for the data collection process would render relevant, in-depth data. I further knew the selected participants had first-hand experience of the specific phenomenon, namely, the indigenous beliefs that black Africans bring to the South African workplace. In fact, one of the main characteristics of qualitative studies is its focus on exploring, describing, and understanding of human phenomena and how humans experience a specific phenomenon, and the meanings they assign to it in the workplace (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kumar, 2011; Maree, 2007).

A qualitative approach "involves purposeful sampling of sites and individuals" (Creswell, 2007, p. 110). However, because the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no need for me to search for a common private setting (venue) for the participant and myself as it was not possible to conduct personal face-to-face interviews. This was because of transport suspensions and the prohibition of personal contact sessions or occasions. Consequently, to avoid leaving my study project pending or unfinished, I opted to recruit participants, gain their informed acceptance to participate, and prepared to do the data collection online via the Zoom or Microsoft Teams platform. The constructivist grounded theory approach developed by Charmaz (2006) was used for the data analysis process. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the researcher provides a theory or an explanation for a process, action, or an interaction that is shaped by the input of a number of participants.

A pilot study was done to assess whether the predetermined open-ended questions would be understood by the participants in the main study. Also, if any misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the open-ended questions occurred, it could be rectified before the commencement of the main study. No changes were identified after the pilot study. The participants understood the questions and the flow was succinct. Once this had been concluded, I focussed my attention to find a suitable, workable, and manageable design and methodology that would ensure the research questions were answered. The diagram labelled as Figure 1 shows the eight-step design that guided me to explore the indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace.

Figure 1: Research design process



Source: Adapted from Carrim (2012, p. 124)

3.5 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

With the interpretivist paradigm, the role of qualitative researchers is to reflect on the data that has been collected. Qualitative researchers need to be knowledgeable and have insight to critically assess the statements made by the participants as it enables them to then produce arguments or explanations for the phenomenon (Carcary, 2009). With the positivist approach, the role of the researcher is independent of the research. The researcher engages in observing, recording, and analysing only the data (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). However, in the interpretivist approach used in this study, the role of a qualitative researcher is to "enter" the lives of the participants and then to ask them to talk about the details of their experiences (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). It is very important for the researcher to build rapport with the participants so that they feel comfortable in their relationship with the researcher. A mutually trustful relationship will allow the researcher to access key details of the story

being shared by the participant (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Conducting the interviews myself made me an integral part of the data collection process.

For the purpose of the qualitative research study, it is important for the researcher to be able to communicate effectively. Good communication becomes more important when interviews are conducted with individuals from a culture different from that of the interviewer, or when English is not their first or even second language (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2007). Having good communication skills assures that in-depth information is obtained. Combining more than one question in a sentence may result in the participant becoming confused (Birks et al., 2007). It is especially important to restrict open-ended questions to a single issue during an online interview. From my own knowledge of myself, I know that I have a tendency to speak very fast. To make sure the participants would understand my question, I had to learn to talk much slower and to repeat a question once or twice to facilitate understanding. Despite all the participants being of the African culture, they all agreed the interviews could be conducted in English as they are proficient in English.

Birks et al. (2007) state part of the interviewer's task is to guide the interview process and to ensure it remains on track. It is especially necessary when the participant tends to divert from the topic(s) under discussion. During my interaction with the interviewees, listening and "hearing" exactly what a participant said was not a problem. I could (a) redirect the discussion if needed and (b) replay an interview as much as I wanted to during the data analysis process.

Consequently, I engaged in active listening and made sure that additional questions that would help me to answer my research questions were asked. Engaging in interviews in my own workplace is a core function of my job. Hence, as an experienced interviewer, I combined my expertise and the interview skills I had acquired from doing my MCom research to engage in the current study interviews. I paid attention to the participants' facial expressions, their body language (how they sat and hand/arm movements), and gave them enough time to think before answering. The questions were asked in a succinct manner and not in a manner that would leave the participant confused regarding the question. This approach paved the way for me to obtain relevant answers, positive responses, insightful explanations, and additional narrative data from all 35 participants.

Tinker and Armstrong (2008) have posited that being from a different ethnic group as the participants in a study (outsider status) has benefits for the research process in that the researcher can obtain detailed responses through asking comprehensive interview questions and participants will have less fear of being judged. As a non-African researcher, it was important for me to understand from the participants in this study, the cultural practices within their communities as I have a limited understanding of this. Participants were therefore asked to share information regarding their cultural practices at various life stages, to allow me to understand their culture better and to test whether my understanding of their cultural practices was correct.

3.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the methods that the researcher adopts to proceed with the research study (Goundar, 2012). To ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that will elicit sufficient, in-depth data pertinent to the research questions, it is important for the researcher to be acquainted with the methods available to conduct research. The researcher then chooses the appropriate methodology that will extract the best answers to the research questions. Goundar (2012) states the term “research methodology” directs the research on every aspect of the data gathering and analysis processes. From choosing an appropriate design to the data collection and analysis processes, including discussions/evaluations of the outcomes, results, findings, and evaluations, the researcher needs to constantly keep in mind the ethical principles safeguarding all scientific research. I started with my data collection process during the pandemic.

3.6.1 Sampling

Qualitative sampling techniques aim to obtain information from specific groups within a population (Carrim, 2012; Oppong, 2013). Qualitative methods are referred to as “purposive” (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014) when the researcher selects specific participants who he or she believes will provide enough in-depth information for the data analysis and subsequent answering of the research questions. For this study, I used purposive snowball sampling. It allowed me to select individuals who I believed would provide meaningful answers even though no direct face-to-face involvement occurred.

I engaged with employed black Africans that I know via an email or cellular phone. I invited them to participate in my study and also enquired whether they could recommend other employed friends and/or colleagues who would be interested in participation. For recommended participants, I requested their contact details and proceeded to engage with them on their preferred communication system. To further seek potential participants, I placed information regarding my study on the LinkedIn website and received a fair number of responses from employed individuals interested to participate. LinkedIn is a social networking site that is targeted at professionals within the workplace. The sampling criteria for inclusion in the study prescribed that

- participants need to be black Africans who worked in the South African formal corporate environment
- participants need to be Black African traditional healers
- participants could be HR managers (of any race who have dealt with black Africans in the workplace), and
- participants could be male or female.

The reason for including traditional healers and HR managers was to obtain triangulation from the experiences that the participants had shared with me.

Snowball sampling allows the researcher to locate information-rich participants through current participants (Shaheen, Pradhan, & Ranajee, 2019). Creswell (2007) agrees that identifying cases of interest from people who know people usually render information-rich data. In my study, asking the friends and/or colleagues whom I was acquainted with for referrals to other potential participants of a similar stature resulted in finding traditional healers who were also employed in a South African workplace. If I had not used this method, it would have been very difficult to identify employees who were traditional healers as it is not something that these individuals necessarily publicise in their place of work.

The sample size used in qualitative research studies is relatively small when compared to quantitative studies. Qualitative research pursues in-depth and descriptive narratives of the phenomenon that is being studied (Shaheen et al., 2019). The aim is not to pursue a statistically significant probability among a generalised population (Fugard & Potts, 2015). A small qualitative sample may eventuate in not achieving

data saturation. Data saturation occurs when further interviews provide no new themes or perspectives (Maree, 2007). Data saturation in my qualitative study was high as I was fortunate to select participants who contributed quality data in a meaningful manner (Patton, 2002). After having interviewed all 35 participants, no new data emerged from the participants.

3.6.2 Biographical data of the sample

Table 1 is a depiction of the biographical data of the participants in my study. All of the participants were assigned participant numbers to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. With reference to gender, twenty-five of the participants were female and ten were male. Of all thirty-five participants, eight identified themselves as HR managers and four as traditional healers. From an age perspective, twenty-four of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 35, and eleven were older than 36 years.

Table 1: Biographical data of the participants

Participant Number	Gender	Culture	Religious affiliation	Age	Employee	HR manager	Traditional healer
1	Female	Amapondo	NA	18 – 35	X		
2	Female	Pedi	Christian	18 – 35	X		
3	Male	Tswana	Christian	18 – 35	X	X	
4	Male	Zulu	Christian	18 – 35	X		X
5	Female	Zulu	Christian	18 – 35	X		
6	Female	Zulu	N/A	18 - 35	X	X	
7	Female	Zulu	N/A	18 - 35	X		X
8	Female	Tsonga	Catholic	18 - 35	X		
9	Female	Xhosa	Anglican	18 - 35	X	X	
10	Female	Swati	Christian	18 - 35	X	X	
11	Female	Ndebele	Christian	18 - 35	X		
12	Female	Xhosa	Christian	18 - 35	X		
13	Male	Xhosa	N/A	18 - 35			X
14	Female	Tswana	Christian	18 - 35	X		
15	Female	Xhosa	Christian	18 - 35	X		
16	Female	Xhosa/Tswana	Christian	18 - 35	X		
17	Female	Tswana	Christian	18 - 35	X		
18	Male	Tsonga	Christian	18 - 35	X		
19	Female	Sotho	Christian	18 - 35	X		
20	Female	Pedi	N/A	18 - 35	X		
21	Female	Xhosa	Christian	18 - 35	X	X	
22	Male	Zulu	Christian	18 - 35	X		X
23	Female	Ndebele	Christian	18 - 35	X		
24	Male	Pedi/Venda	Christian	18 - 35	X		
25	Male	Zulu	N/A	36 - 55	X		
26	Female	Zulu	Catholic	36 - 55	X		
27	Female	Zulu	Christian	36 - 55	X		
28	Male	Zulu	Christian	36 - 55	X		
29	Female	Tswana	Catholic	36 - 55	X		
30	Male	Indian	Muslim	36 - 55		X	
31	Female	Pedi	Christian	36 - 55	X	X	
32	Female	Zulu	Christian	36 - 55	X		
33	Male	Pedi	N/A	36 - 55	X		
34	Female	Zulu	Christian	36 - 55	X		
35	Female	Indian	Hindu	36 - 55		X	

3.6.3 Data collection

Qualitative data was collected via individual interviews which is the primary data collection method of qualitative research (Stuckey, 2013). Maree (2007) describes an interview in academic/scientific research as a two-way conversation between an interviewer (usually the main researcher in qualitative studies) and a participant (sometimes referred to as the interviewee). During the interviews, the researcher poses questions to the participants with the aim to extract some meaning and understanding from the participant's answer of how they feel, view, or understand the question. Their viewpoints, beliefs, experiences, and/or understanding of the research question may influence their behaviour and approach to it in real life. The purpose of a qualitative interview is to view the world through the eyes of the participant.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected postgraduate studies done by students all over the world. In my case, adherence to the restrictive rules and regulations in terms of travelling, personal contact, and the staying-at-home policy during the pandemic forced me to rethink my data collection and analysis processes. If this data collection process was done under "normal" circumstances, the 35 face-to-face interviews would have been done in a safe, private setting that suited both the participants and the researcher. It would have allowed participants to share their experiences frankly in a setting that would guarantee every participant's anonymity from, e.g., co-workers or senior staff members. In addition, I would have had to pay careful attention to the interview site. This would have included preparing the setting, choosing a comfortable chair for the participant, setting up a recording device, and testing and retesting it for quality sound purposes and so forth.

It is acknowledged in literature that the global COVID-19 pandemic changed the whole approach to conduct postgraduate research studies (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020; Gabrielle, 2021 & Thompson 2020). In fact, Boufenchoucha and Herry Chandra (2021, p. 2) admit that the "research methodologies probably play a major role in the extent to which persons [researchers] experience the impact of COVID-19." To illustrate, the findings of their study done with Master's students at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia in Jijel-Algeria, indicated that 48 per cent of the students agreed strongly that the COVID-19 pandemic affected not only their predicted study timeframe, but also their future plans.

COVID-19 indeed interfered a bit with my study design, method of data collection, and certain ethical issues such as informed consent, the data collection process, confidentiality–anonymity for the participant, and keeping the interview as well as qualitative data shared during and after the interview confidential (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020). I discussed the situation with my supervisor. We agreed that, to continue with my study and hand it in on time, I would interview the selected participants using online technology and slightly adapt the ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and causing no harm to participants to fit the situation.

Whereas before COVID-19 using an audio device to record interviews was the norm in face-to-face interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2007; Saunders et al. 2012), researchers “transitioning to online platforms for data collection during the COVID-19 crisis will need to carefully record their methods to allow for replication both during and after COVID-19” (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020, p. 648). Hence, I recorded the interviews in two ways: on my laptop and my cellular phone to make sure I had a back-up recording in case one of my devices malfunctioned. Oliffe, Kelly, Montaner and Yu Ko (2021) agree that the COVID-19 pandemic forced researchers to adapt to virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams for data collection. Furthermore, they indicate that with participants being based at home due to restrictions on movement, it allowed for better engagement and improved availability of participants. Using virtual platforms also allowed for data collection across geographical boundaries. From my experience, using a virtual platform for the gathering of qualitative data, I agree with Oliffe et al., (2021) that engagement with and finding the most suitable participants was easier and less time consuming. Informed consent was obtained using an electronic form, of which the link was sent to the participants. Participants had to read the informed consent form, and provide their consent electronically. The electronically signed informed consent forms were then downloaded and stored. Each participant received a unique link to complete their informed consent and it was not possible for any of the participants to view another participant’s consent form. Confidentiality of the recorded interview data and informed consent forms was maintained by storing it in a single folder that was password protected, on a USB device.

As a result of the restrictions on travel, and not being based in the Gauteng province at the time, I conducted all interviews using Microsoft Teams or Zoom as a platform. I was able to use these tools effectively and made sure all participants were also skilled in whichever platform they chose. This allowed great flexibility, as the interviews could be conducted on weekdays or weekends, early mornings or in the evenings without any concern of having to physically travel to a venue. Because of the digital nature of the interactions, the interviews could also be rescheduled with limited inconvenience to the researcher or the participants. The interviews mimicked a face-to-face interview as both I and the participants kept our cameras on. In fact, Boufenchoucha and Herry Chandra (2021, p. 8) confirm that students at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia in Jijel-Algeria also viewed "online meetings as equivalent to face-to-face meetings".

During the entire qualitative research process, trust between the researcher and participant is of the essence. The more trust, respect, and openness there is between the researcher and the participant, the safer the participant will feel to readily disclose her or his true feelings, experiences, and/or emotional stance about the situation or phenomenon being discussed. Truthful, honest answers or opinions lead to valid and reliable first-hand data being obtained from a source. Thus, the researcher receives sufficient and rich narratives to work with during the analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Gray, 2016; Hofstee, 2009).

Bearing in mind the circumstances caused by COVID-19, I believe I succeeded to establish good rapport with the participants by being friendly and courteous. I further showed great understanding to participants who were not as familiar with the intricacies of conducting interviews via Zoom or Teams as I am. I took care to avoid monopolising or "ruling" an interview (Kale as cited in Creswell, 2007). Demonstrating a great deal of patience, I did not involve myself in a one-way dialogue and neither did I allow a participant to deflect a question (Kale as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 140). In my opinion, my approach was sensible, open, and considerate as all participants shared very personal information regarding their experiences. Some of the participants were employed at the same workplace that I, as the researcher, worked. Through good rapport and maintaining confidentiality, the participants from my workplace were willing to share their experiences openly with me. Possessing a dual status as researcher

and HR manager, allowed me to become aware of challenges that employees may face within the work environment.

I used semi-structured interviews to collect the data. This method is used to understand the opinions of those participating in the study. A strength of semi-structured interviews is that it allows the researcher to probe for answers should further insights be needed. It further allows the researcher to investigate other areas that may not have been considered by the researcher (Maree, 2007). Rich data is extracted from qualitative interviews as participants can reflect on events without having to write any information down (Saunders et al., 2012). Writing information down by participants might also make them reluctant to share their experiences, as they may feel hesitant to provide information that is sensitive in a written form. I had written down a guide for the initial interview questions, which helped me to follow the same sequence of questioning for each participant (see Annexure A).

The interview questions included a scenario question presented in the form of a vignette. Sampson & Johannessen (2020) have indicated that the use of vignettes are common in social science research and its use creates a valuable contribution to qualitative research, through sharing a fictious scenario reflecting a “real-life” experience that elicits rich and detailed responses from participants. The vignette related to a scenario of witchcraft in the workplace and participants were asked to share their perceptions on the scenario.

The scenario paints the story of two employees as follows: “Employee A was promoted a week ago to a middle management position. She is young and extremely intelligent. Employee B is older (in her 40s) and really wanted the promotion but cannot get ahead in the organisation. Since Employee A has been promoted, she found dirt in front of her office door the day after she was promoted. On the second day she found a rubbery substance on her car wheel. The third day she became very ill and went to hospital. The doctors cannot find out what is wrong with her. What do you think is happening to Employee A?”

According to Maree (2007), using different ways of probing verifies that what the researcher hears is a good reflection of what *meaning* the participant is trying to convey via the choice of words or sentence structuring in English. Clarification probes

are useful as they help to create understanding. Paraphrasing occurs when researchers briefly summarise what they heard the participant say and question the latter to agree or disagree with the summary (Martinez et al., 2015). Elaboration probes allow the researcher to request more detail to understand the full picture of the issue/question/reply under discussion (Maree, 2007). Detail-oriented probes are the "where," "what" and "why" relating to the participant's response (Martinez et al., 2015). Probing during the interviews allowed me to get clarity on responses given by each of the 35 participants during their individual interviews.

During a face-to-face interview with both the interviewer and interviewee present in person, the interviewers use field notes to capture observational and environmental data to assist and remind them during the data analysis process of what had transpired during each individual interview (Green & Thorogood, 2009; Tjora, 2006). Taking field notes during the online interviews assisted me to record non-verbal cues as well as important points raised by the participants.

Contextual data such as the date, time, location, interview setting as well as my impression on the overall interview was also recorded. The majority of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and the longest interview was 2 hours long. I checked with the participants to ensure that they did not have any other commitments and could continue with the interview. The interviewees were seated in their living rooms, kitchens or home offices and were comfortable with using Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Some of the participants appreciated this platform as it allowed them to engage comfortably and conveniently.

When the interview started, the participants and I had checked that we could hear and see each other clearly. The participants were informed that I would be taking notes during the interview, and that they should not be distracted if I looked away from the camera. The participants were sent the question guide and the link for the informed consent form either via WhatsApp or via email. Sending the question guide beforehand, was with the intention to make the participants feel more relaxed, as they would be aware of the questions that would be posed. The returned informed consent forms were saved in a password protected folder on a USB device to ensure that they were kept safely. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, by myself, to facilitate the data analysis after the data collection stage had ended. This allowed me to be more

engaged with the data. Three participants received their transcripts, to review the contents of transcript and to ensure that data had been captured accurately. This is referred to as member checking and is a means to ensure credibility in qualitative research (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter., 2016).

3.6.4 Pilot study

A pilot study is normally done before attempting the main interviewing process. It is an important part of the personal preparation of the researcher to get acquainted with the interview process. Secondly, with a pilot study the researcher can determine whether the prepared question(s) will bring forth information applicable to answer them and whether they are aligned with the aims of the study (Turner, 2010).

For a pilot study the researcher uses the same interview tool (the questionnaire) to be used in the main study. The purpose is to establish whether all the questions on the questionnaire are easily understood and interpreted correctly by the participants. Using too many academic or scientific words or, on the other hand, jargon or even culturally acceptable expressions may confuse the participants. A pilot study is used to identify whether respondents have problems with answering the questions (e.g., the questions may be ambiguous or unclear) as well as to test the recording of the data (Saunders et al., 2012).

I interviewed three individuals in a pilot study. Importantly, none of the three participants formed part of the main study and neither was the recorded pilot study data included in the main study data. The pilot study allowed me to effectively manage the recording of the data and I became more comfortable with conducting interviews, for the purposes of this study, via an electronic platform. After the pilot study, a vignette regarding witchcraft was added to the interview questions. The participants also touched on the role of traditional healers in their well-being, which resulted in traditional healers being included in the study. I was further able to determine the relevance of the pre-prepared open-ended questions and amend the questions so that the following study aims could be achieved:

- to understand the indigenous cultural beliefs that African people bring into the workplace and how they negotiate their ethnic and professional identities;

- to understand the role that traditional healing and beliefs in witchcraft impact employee experience of the workplace;
- to provide guidance to employers and practitioners on how to deal proactively with indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace setting.

3.6.5 Data analysis strategy

According to Maree (2007), a deductive approach to data analysis is used when the researcher wants to identify themes in advance. However, this might make certain key themes invisible. The qualitative research strategy is characteristically inductive. It is shaped by researchers' experience to logically recognise emerging perspectives as they collect and analyse the data. It is known as identifying themes "from the ground up" and not deductive as in "from a theory or from the perspective of the inquirer" or the researcher (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). I therefore followed the inductive path to develop more knowledge on how black Africans negotiate their indigenous cultural beliefs in the South African workplace. The first step I did to create workable data obtained from the online recorded interviews was to transcribe the interviews verbatim. As I proceeded with the transcriptions, I focussed on noting common features and also differences for the purpose of coding and developing themes, subthemes and, in some cases, categories.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), theory is generated in a grounded theory approach through data collection and analytical methods. Knowledge is also constructed through the grounded experiences of participants in their everyday life (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory helps to explain a practice or provide a framework for further research. The theory is said to be "grounded" in the experiences of the participants and does not come from already existing theories (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory is thus a qualitative research design in which the researcher provides a theory or an explanation for a process, action or an interaction that is shaped by the input of a number of participants. A constructivist grounded theory approach (as developed by Charmaz) was utilised for the purposes of this study with an interpretive tradition. This approach was based on an emic position whereby the researcher adopts a partnership with the participant. This is opposed to an etic approach whereby the researcher remains separate to the research participants and the realities that they create (Taghipour, 2014).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS: CODING

Atlas.ti is a qualitative data analysis tool used for many research projects (Hwang, 2008). This tool can be used for large sections of text as well as audio and visual data (Smit, 2002). Reference to analysis of qualitative data actually refers to the literal analysis of words, sentences, and paragraphs which the researcher will interpret and theorise from the data. They reflect as quotes for the purpose of the study (Smit, 2002). Furthermore, in qualitative data analysis, the purpose is not to make sense of the number of times that an observation is described, but to rather assign meaning to what is being said, and to understand this comprehensively.

Miles and Huberman (1994) assert the breakdown of the data into smaller segments is referred to as “coding”. The aim of coding is to identify characteristics of the data. At the very centre of grounded theory, is the coding of text. According to Licqurish and Seibold (2011, p. 14), “Coding involved examining the interview transcripts and field notes line by line to identify key issues or ‘codes’.” Therefore, using computer software for coding is appropriate. According to Smit (2002), the main feature of coding in grounded theory is to actually build the theory. Open coding refers to the naming and categorisation of phenomena that is described in the text. This data is then grouped together with similar data and a label or code is assigned to it. One of the disadvantages of open coding is that it is time consuming as it is done line by line and by coding either a sentence or a paragraph (Smit, 2002).

In vivo coding is another form of coding in qualitative data analysis that is commonly used with a grounded theory approach (Manning, 2017). When using in vivo coding, emphasis is placed on the actual spoken words of the participants. In the current study in vivo coding was important to a certain extent as some participants used slang, jargon and other words or terms used in a particular culture (Manning, 2017). Axial coding was used to link themes and sub-themes that were developed during the open coding to establish relationships with the data (Carrim, 2012).

A thematic analysis involves identifying pattterns, organising data and providing insights on themes which give meaning to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). According to Heydarian (2016) the use of thematic analysis in grounded theory is very useful for cultural resarch. Upon completion of assigning codes to the data, I engaged with the

data to establish connections between the codes to form themes, and sub-themes which would be used to answer the research questions. These themes and sub-themes had to be reworked and reflected on, to ensure that codes were grouped under the most apprproiate theme. Due to the volume of the codes, sub-themes had to be created, in order to arrange the data meaningfully. Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017) indicate that themes should capture richness and diversity around a topic, which should allow a researcher to wrote a lot about the topic (as opposed to a line or two). Figures two to five below are a representation of the themes and sub-themes that have emerged after the coding exercise. These are presented to provide a summary of the emerging themes in this study and will be discussed in Chapter 4 – 7.

Figure 2: Theme 1 - Sculpting the Black African identity

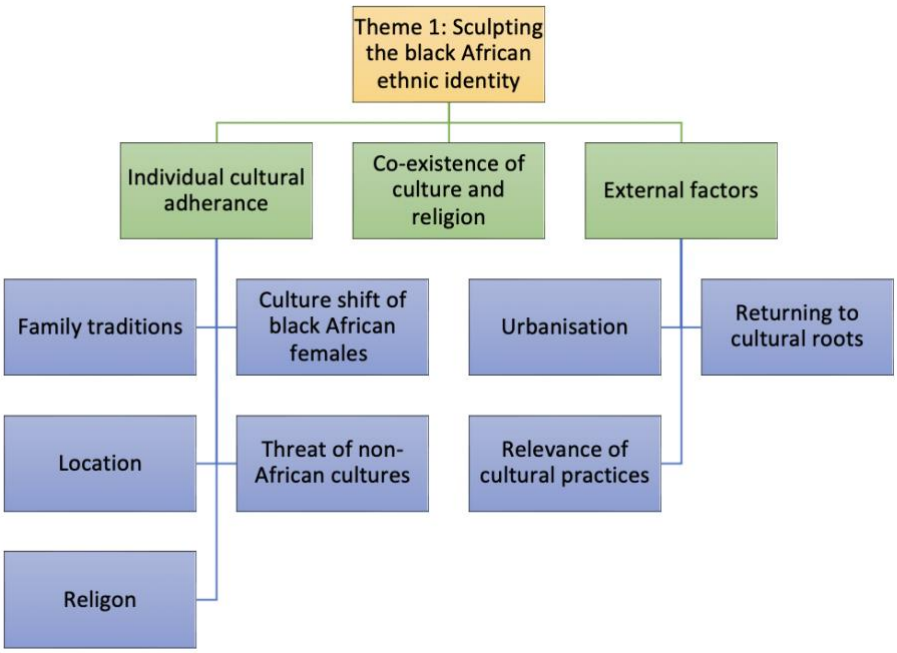


Figure 3: Theme 2 - Black African beliefs in the unseen

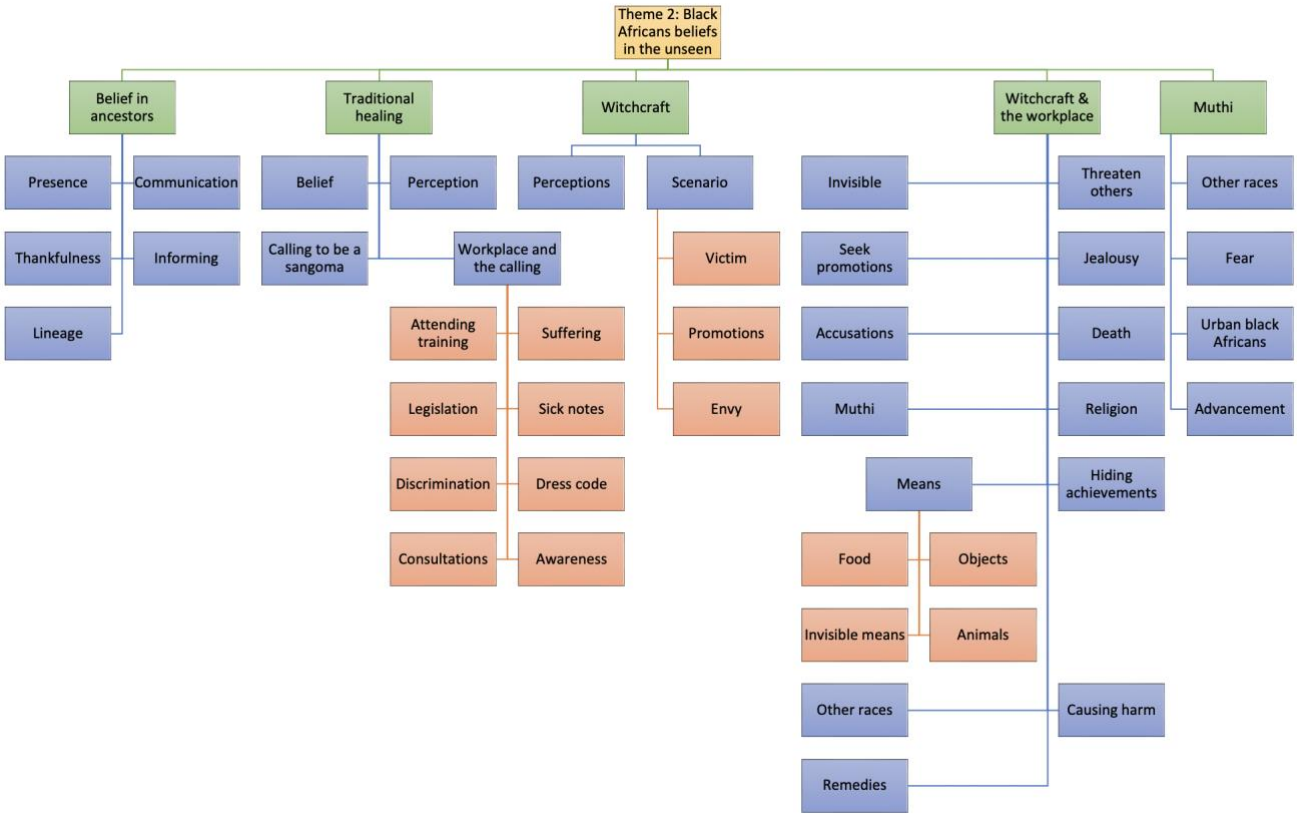


Figure 4: Theme 3 - Black Africans and the workplace

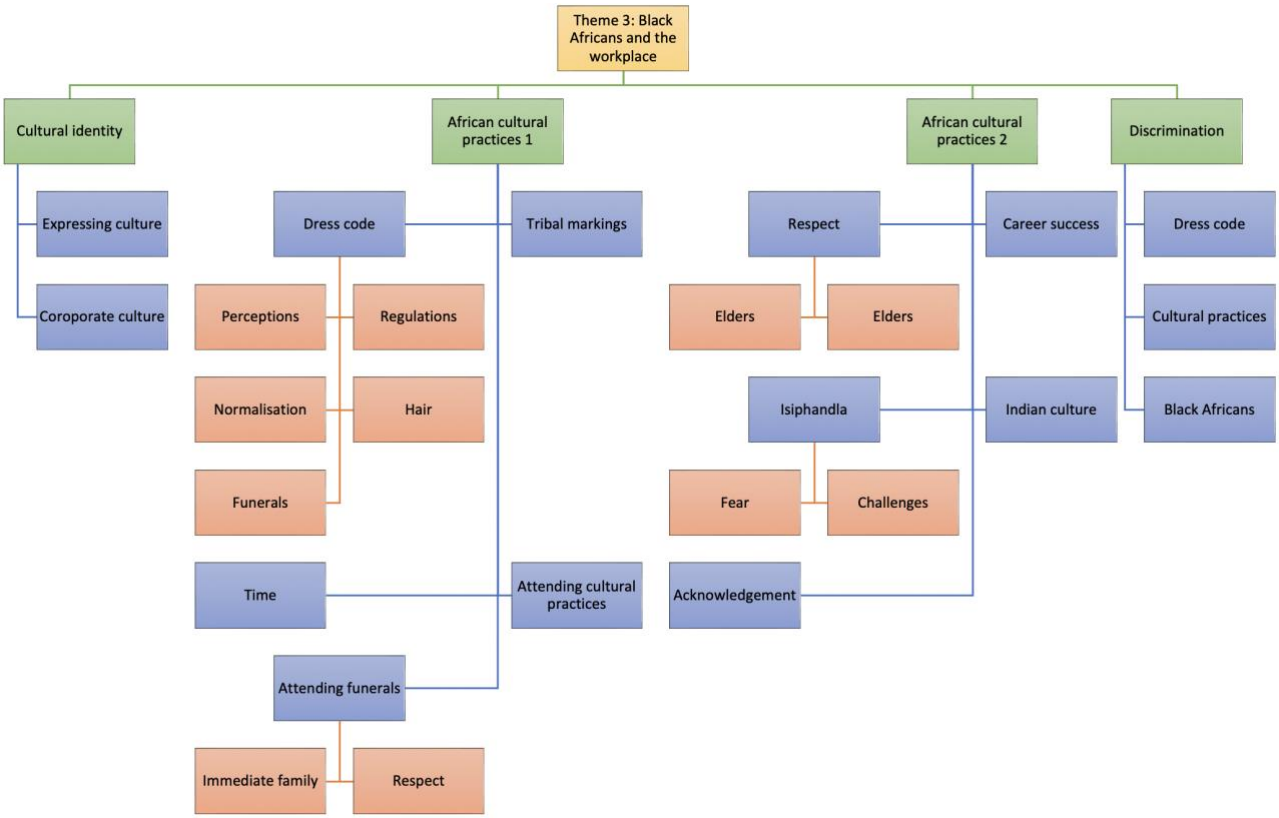
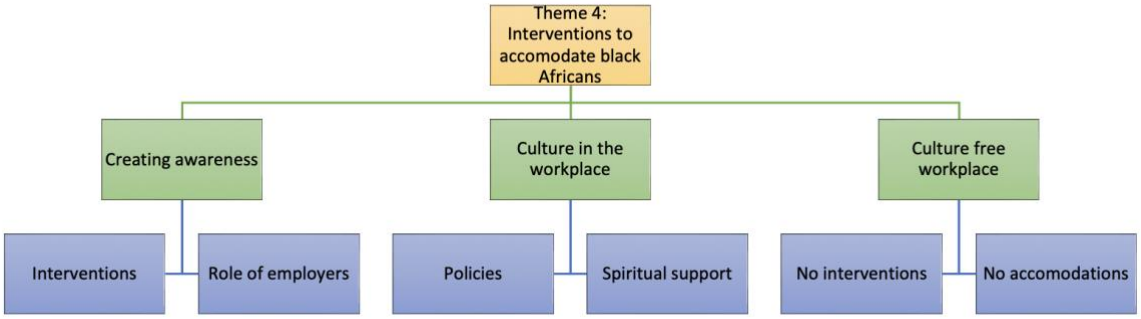


Figure 5: Theme 4 - Interventions to accommodate black Africans in the workplace



3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is a crucial part of research studies. Gravetter and Forzano (2009) assert research ethics is solely the responsibility of the researcher. The researcher must undertake to be totally and continuously truthful to all those participating in the study as well as those affected by the study. According to Watts (2008), integrity in qualitative research refers to the honesty and ethical practice of the researcher in activities that include data collection and data analysis. It also includes the responsibility of the researcher to not harm the participants, to gain their informed consent and to represent the views of the participants as accurately as can be done.

I was completely and sincerely binded to abide by the ethical considerations as prescribed by Saunders et al. (2012) below. But, my study was conducted during the level 4 lockdown period of COVID-19. Working as an industrial psychologist myself, I understood perfectly well that I, as the researcher, had to take the responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of the participants because of the sensitive nature of the study topic. I was therefore encouraged when I read that in the US, the current American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct were scrutinised by researchers during the pandemic to assure "all of the principles and standards in the current APA ethics code apply in one way or another to psychologists' response to COVID-19" (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020, p. 653).

3.8.1 Integrity of the researcher

Prior to commencing my research study, I was required to obtain ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee. In the submission that I had to make to the Ethics Committee, I had to submit my research proposal which also contained detailed information regarding the methodology of the study. Receiving approval to proceed with my study, indicated that the Ethics Committee approved the manner in which my study was to be conducted.

I acted openly and was totally honest in my dealings and communication with all participants throughout the research process. Nobody saw the online recordings or the verbatim transcripts, not even my supervisor. I also maintained the anonymity and

confidentiality of the data collected. I have kept all my research notes and interview recordings stored safely on a special USB storage device which contains folders that are password protected. All these remain safely in my home in a place only I know. The research data will be kept for a period of 5 years from publication of this thesis. I did not misrepresent any data or facts throughout the data collection process or the analysis thereof. In fact, I did not use names of cities, towns, or places of work mentioned by the participants (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger as cited by Surmiak, 2018). I also did not violate the privacy of the participants in any way or at any stage during an interview or when writing up the findings and results.

3.8.2 Respect for others

I treated all participants with the utmost respect throughout the study and during all the interactions that we had. I did my best to establish a trusting and open relationship with all the participants to ensure that they felt safe and comfortable to share their views and opinions honestly. Before each interview, I told the participant if he or she finds a question “sensitive or intrusive”, he or she will be given enough time to decide whether they wanted to answer or decline answering (Kumar, 2011, p. 221). None declined answering a question.

3.8.3 Avoiding harm

I was very careful to ensure that the participants were protected from both mental and physical harm. I did not conduct myself in any manner that could cause stress, discomfort, or embarrassment to the participants. Although I was slightly concerned when talking about witchcraft that some participants might become emotional or feel alarmed, this did not happen. Also, knowing that some participants might have been overly stressed or suffered some kind of trauma as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I undertook to show great understanding if or when they could not honour our appointment for an online interview, or wanted to withdraw from the study. However, only one participant requested a postponement of the online interview which I respectfully granted. We rescheduled the interview and did it at a later date.

3.8.4 Voluntary participation

Throughout the duration of my study, participation was totally voluntary. None of the participants were coerced to participate. The participants were well informed that they could withdraw at any time without prejudice and without stating a reason. To make sure participants had chosen to participate of their own accord, I requested them to return their signed informed consent form to me without delay. As soon as I received a participant's signed form, I contacted him or her to decide on a suitable date and time for conducting the interviews. In addition, before every interview I again reminded each participant that they could request and would be granted withdrawal at any time.

3.8.5 Informed consent

All of the participants completed an informed consent form before we scheduled an online meeting. I sent a personal email or WhatsApp message to all individuals who showed an interest to participate in my study after I had spoken to them personally. The recipients were all informed via telephone or cellular phone as well as in the email that they could decline the interview even after it had been scheduled. After the allocated time, 35 fully completed and signed informed consent forms were received All were completed electronically using Microsoft Forms. The informed consent form provided an overview of my study, the purpose of the study, and what their role would be as a participant. It further contained all my contact details and that of my supervisor if they needed additional information or clarification on some aspect of the study.

3.8.6 Confidentiality

Confidentiality as well anonymity of the participants was maintained at all times. To further promote confidentiality and anonymity, I assigned a participant number to all of the participants. I requested them to ensure they were alone and in a private place in their homes or place of work when we conducted the interviews, as we were still experiencing a lockdown and most of the participants worked from home. On my part, I conducted the interviews from my study room and I was alone.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

I used the Atlas.ti Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for analysing the enormous amount of unstructured data I had collected from the 35

participants into an organised whole. According to Muhr (2004), Atlas.ti helps the researcher to make sense of phenomena that is contained in the data, enabling the researcher to transform raw data into useful knowledge. I did not falsify the collected data and relied entirely on the Atlas.ti software to search and manage the data and cluster it together in themes and subthemes, after I had analysed it. I immersed myself in the data to ensure that I was thoroughly acquainted with the stories of each of the participants.

The storing and retrieval processes are simplified and makes the data analysis process much faster and easier when using a CAQDAS program such as Atlas.ti (Wickham & Woods, 2005). I ensured data confidentiality of the data by analysing it myself in the privacy and security of my own study at home and describing each participant using their participant number. The real names of the participants are reflected on their informed consent forms. The informed consent forms I only used to confirm that the data I was working with at that moment did indeed come from Mr. X whose participant number was, e.g., 2 whom I interviewed on a particular day at a specific time. I reflected on the findings and added my field and personal notes to the appropriate participant numbers assigned to the participants to enrich the findings and give it more meaning.

3.10 DATA MANAGEMENT

All collected and analysed data I treated as confidential and took care to ensure that no data became accessible in a public domain. No data was leaked to individuals who were not authorised to see it. I further abided to the ethical principles as ordained and approved by the University of Pretoria.

3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Positivist researchers tend to regard qualitative research methods as unscientific as they focus on issues such as validity, reliability, and generalisability (Carcary, 2009). However, methods to evaluate a qualitative research inquiry do exist. Trustworthiness is an important characteristic of assessing qualitative research (Fink, 2000). It is imperative for the researcher to make sure there is quality in the research inquiry.

According to Neuman (2003), data which is of a high quality indicates that the researcher has been involved quite thoroughly in the research process.

An audit trail increases the trustworthiness of a qualitative study by allowing an independent person to review the data and processes. This will allow the independent person to give input on the credibility and consistency of the findings (Carrim, 2012). The audit trail I kept included notes from all the interviews which I documented. Guba and Lincoln (1994) developed a criteria list to assess the quality of qualitative research. The comparison to a positivist inqury is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison criteria between quantitative and qualitative research

Positivist Perspective	Interpretivist Perspective
Internal validity	Credibility
Reliability	Dependability
External validity	Transferability
Objectivity	Confirmability

Source: Shenton (2004)

3.11.1 Credibility

Credibility confirms that the findings are a true reflection of the phenomenon being studied. Credibility is similar to the internal validity used in a quantitative research perspective. Shenton (2004) states credibility can be achieved by using well-established research methods, triangulation by utilising a wide variety of informants, allowing participants to refuse to participate in the study, and regular debriefing sessions with others to discuss alternative approaches. The main focus of demonstrating credibility is to show that the research design accurately identified and described the phenomenon that was investigated, and that the researcher was able to gain full access to the knowledge and meaning shared by the participants (Carcary, 2009).

For the purposes of my study and bearing in mind the reference to Shenton's (2004) contribution in the above paragraph, I established credibility by using well-established

qualitative methods for the data collection, namely the grounded theory which is used by other researchers in studies related to social experiences and phenomena, and semi-structured interviews. As an Indian female, I conducted the interviews with limited knowledge and little understanding of the Black African culture. My previous knowledge could therefore not taint the study findings. Many of the participants were intrigued by the fact that an Indian female was interested in exploring their indigenous culture and beliefs. They seemed honoured as they demonstrated enthusiasm to share their experiences with me. My interest in their traditional beliefs inspired them to talk about their experiences honestly and openly in the workplace. This may be ascribed to the reassurance they felt that there was no fear to be judged by a fellow black African. Discussions on the topics in my study remain taboo in their social settings.

Seeking triangulation of the data I spoke to acquaintances that I know to verify the ceremonies and beliefs within the African culture. With reference to participation in the study, I calmly accepted refusals to participate from individuals whom I had initially invited to take part in this study. The majority who intended to participate right from the start did indeed participate. Two who were invited and seemed keen to join this research endeavour eventually declined participation. One had no option because of work commitments and the other, although seemingly looking forward to be a participant, did not respond with a date and time for an interview. I did not force any of them to participate and did not request a reason from either one. None of the final 35 selected participants withdrew from the study.

My supervisor played a key role in ensuring that there was integrity and deep thought in the write-up of my study. She forced me to review the data, think critically, and to rethink my coding of the data as well as my subsequent interpretations thereof. Her contribution and insight was valuable and further ensured the credibility of my study. During the transcription of the data, whenever I encountered difficulties to decipher the meaning of the raw data or experienced problems like pondering on what some parts really meant, I reverted to the participant to clarify exactly what she or he meant.

From my own perspective as a registered industrial psychologist working in the field of human resources, an important part of my job is to conduct interviews and interact with people who I have never met before. Despite knowledge of some of the

participants who are my colleagues within my workplace, the relationship between the participants and me was open. I could freely ask probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon discussed during the interviews.

3.11.2 Dependability

Dependability relates to ensuring that the research process has been carefully designed and planned so that, if the study is repeated using the same participants and methods and in the same context, it would yield similar results (Shenton, 2004). This is similar to reliability in a quantitative research study. Dependability is achieved by keeping full records of all phases of the research process. It includes field as well as personal notes, all individual interview transcripts, and all data analysis forms (Carrim, 2012). Allowing the use of Atlas.ti made the storing of the analysed data easy while it remained accessible to me only since I had a special code to gain access.

3.11.3 Transferability

Transferability means that the researcher provides a clear indication of the context in which the data was collected. This will allow other researchers to use the criteria should they wish to replicate the study in other situations (Maree, 2007). This is similar to external validity from a quantitative research perspective whereby external valdity relates to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Carrim (2016b) indicates that transferability can be achieved through rich descriptions that is obtained through the fieldwork, the extent of the richness of the data collected, and presenting the data in a full report.

For my study and bearing in mind the aforementioned transferability considerations provided by Shenton (2004), I ensured transferability in my study by providing specific restrictions in terms of the inclusion criteria on the type of people that I wanted to interview. I believed their particular individual experiences in the formal workplace and their unyielding belief in their traditional values and belief systems would add a richness to the collected data. I also specified my data collection methods, the number of interviews (35) as well as the duration of the interview sessions, and how I managed the collection and analysis processes despite the barriers brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the results of an inquiry can be confirmed or corroborated by researchers who may conduct a similar study (Anney, 2014). Its purpose is to ensure that the data used and the findings are valid and derived from the data, and not made up by the researcher. Audit trails are regarded as the principal technique to establish confirmability in qualitative research (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004) along with a reflexive journal or triangulation (Bowen, 2009).

I kept an updated audit trail consisting of documents in which I explained my research decisions as well as activities that I had undertaken throughout my research process. This allowed me to further reflect on how the study unfolded.

I am quite convinced that the COVID-19 issue has probably changed the postgraduate research field forever. Boufenchoucha and Herry Chandra (2021) fully support the stance of Lourenco and Tasimi (2020) as well as Wolkewitz and Puljak (2020) who posit that the “generalizability of data gathered in these exceptional circumstances could be a problem even for those who can continue their research”. It was an extremely challenging experience for me to collect data, analyse it and describe it while feeling quite lonely and isolated from my peers and supervisor who were in a similar position. I therefore want to irrevocably state that I have done my utmost best to adhere to the ethical trustworthiness element of a qualitative research study to assure it is transferable to other studies, and to the benefit of researchers who decide to do research on a similar topic in similar settings.

3.12 DISTRUBUTION OF FINDINGS PER CHAPTER

The findings after the data analysis are distributed over the next four Chapters. In each Chapter, I describe one of the four themes that emerged from the data analysis. It must be noted that the themes are in no particular order of importance but are presented and discussed in a logical manner.

- Chapter 4: Theme 1: Sculpting the Black African ethnic identity
- Chapter 5: Theme 2: Black Africans’ beliefs in the unseen
- Chapter 7: Theme 3: Black Africans navigating the workplace
- Chapter 8: Theme 4: Interventions to accommodate black Africans in

the workplace

3.13 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I described and thoroughly discussed my reasons for choosing the research design and methodology. I also attended to the influence of COVID-19 and how I managed to adapt the method of collecting qualitative data. My ontological and epistemological approach was clarified and explained. The population, sample, and sampling method were explained as were the collection instrument, data collection process, and the pilot interview. The data analysis for qualitative research was detailed and the ethical considerations applied consistently were addressed. Trustworthiness in qualitative research studies was foregrounded. In Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 I present the findings of the data collection phase of the study as mentioned before.

CHAPTER 4:
THEME 1: SCULPTING THE BLACK AFRICAN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Countless factors influence and determine how black African's shape and merge culture to assert their cultural identity, both in the home environment as well as in the workplace. I describe this as 'sculpting the Black African ethnic identity'. Adherence to culture is not the only manifestation as there are also those who choose not to adhere to culture totally, but to pick and choose only those cultural practices they identify with. Nevertheless, the important fact to consider is that all of these personal choices equally shape who they are.

This is the first of four Chapters in which I present the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Once the interview data had been transcribed, it was analysed using Atlas ti. The assigned codes were grouped together, in terms of similarity or the idea that it had addressed, These codes were then further engaged to form sub themes, after which the four main themes emerged. The first theme, Sculpting the Black African ethnic identity, is addressed in this chapter. Participant numbers are used to ensure anonymity (see Chapter 3, section 3.8.6).

4.1 INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL ADHERENCE

Most participants admitted culture influences many facets of their life stages such as births, weddings, and funerals. The participants shared with a sense of pride that they participate in a multitude of practices occurring during these occasions. Their participation indicates how adherence to sociocultural practices moulds their beliefs and adherence to their own cultures.

Because many existing ethnic groups make up SA's cultural landscape, it is obvious that cultural practices between these ethnic groups or tribes differ greatly. The narratives obtained from the participants confirmed that most black Africans cling to the cultural beliefs of their individual tribes and communities. Cultural beliefs manifest during the practise of cultural ceremonies, as Participant 22 explained:

> "*Basically it* [culture] *applies to literally everything. … initially anything good, anything bad so whether it's the birth of a child, there are certain ceremonies that need to take place to introduce the child to the ancestors, it just differs*

from clan [tribe] *to clan* [tribe]*, from different clans* [tribes] *but I'd say the practice remains the same. There are certain fixed things that you need to do at the birth of a child, the death of a loved one you know there are certain practices like, for instance, slaughtering of a goat or a cow …. So I'd say from where I stand, literally cultural practices applies* [*sic*] *on a day to day basis and there are specific ceremonies, those are just examples of certain things that are common. But I think, like I said, it varies from clan* [tribe] *to clan* [tribe]."

4.1.1 Exploring the pieces of the sculpture which keeps families and communities together

Traditional cultural beliefs and practices are passed down from generation to generation through parents, grandparents, and other family members. It plays a crucial role in the forming of the ethnic identity of black Africans. The role of immediate family is thus vital in the continuation of cultural practices. The participants shared that the practising of cultural beliefs does not happen in isolation, but whole families and communities are often brought together by these practices. While practices are influenced by geographical locations such as in an urban or a rural setting, the participants commented they easily adapted to the cultural practices in a new environment.

4.1.1.1 Family traditions

Some participants who did not actively practise cultural traditions in their immediate family said their own family members did not force them to become involved in cultural activities. However, they admitted that circumstances and changes in their lifestyle often led to them having no choice but to adapt to and participate in cultural practices. Especially in cases of being part of an extended family, engagement in traditional cultural practices was expected to assure an ongoing sense of "being one community" and to demonstrate their acknowledgement and respect for those upholding traditional cultural practices. These participants shared they were obliged to attend ceremonies and participate in cultural activities. Another reason why cultural non-practising participants felt it was expected of them to play a certain role during cultural ceremonies was ascribed to the fact that they were the first sibling and thus

automatically held the status of being "*the eldest*" in the family. Participant 32 explained:

> "*So you can grow up in a family … which isn't necessarily cultural in terms of they don't do all the cultural things. But we've got extended family, and we've got people, even siblings who marry into families like that* [for whom cultural practices are important]*. And when they have something* [a cultural activity] *you're expected to be there. So my husband's brother is very traditional. So he will expect us from time to time to engage in cultural activities, because we also now have to respect the fact that he's* [the brother of Participant 32's husband] *chosen to become cultural, although he didn't come from a cultural family. And because my husband is the eldest, most of the rituals require the eldest sibling, especially when the father has passed, to be the one who leads even though they themselves are not cultural in nature. So for those of us who are expected to be there, because cultural functions and cultural things are unlike religious belief, they are community, they require everyone to do. It doesn't necessarily require the next person to also be religious, you know, it's like … an individual thing you do… whereas with cultural things it's imperative that you do them with a community* [group] *of people who is typically your family.*"

4.1.1.2 Culture shift of Black African females

Many female participants indicated that they ascribe (or will ascribe) to the cultural practices of their husbands. It was explained that particularly in marriage, the cultural position of the bride is not a point for discussion or even a debatable issue–it is customary that she will follow her husband's culture. Participant 16 told me her mother is a descendant from the Tswana culture and her father is a traditional Xhosa. When Participant 16 was growing up, she automatically engaged with the Xhosa culture of her father:

> "*When two people get married, usually you…* [the wife] *take on your husband's traditions and culture and you sort of move from being a Batswana – if you are a Batswana, like my mum for example, she becomes* [became] *Xhosa and the kids as well become* [became] *Xhosa...*"

On the other hand, some participants explained that, depending on the structure of the immediate family, children may grow up following the cultural practices of their mothers. For instance, Participant 14 shared that her grandfather was Venda and her grandmother Tswana. When growing up, Participant 14's mother had no ties or relationship with her father and therefore she (Participant 14's mother) took on the Tswana culture of her mother, thus Participant 14's grandmother. Similarly, Participant 14's father is also from the Venda culture but she (Participant 14) also follows the customs of the Tswana (her mother's) people:

> "*I grew up Tswana … so I grew up knowing my grandmother was Tswana and then my mum* [was Tswana] *but my grandfather was Venda. But we didn't have the connection right. So my mum grew up as a Tswana woman even though in our culture, you are what your father is, right. So she's technically Venda but she didn't grow up that way so I grew up Tswana, but my dad was Venda but also, similarly to my mum, I didn't practise the Venda culture. I grew up as a Tswana woman. And so, that's what I identify as my culture, I am a Tswana woman.*"

4.1.1.3 Location

Location played a definitive role in determining the cultural beliefs the participants followed as they tried to blend in with their communities. Participant 16 shared that, despite being from the Xhosa bloodline by birth, she grew up in a Tswana community. She and her family speak Tswana. Although having Xhosa names, Participant 16 and her siblings practised many traditionally Tswana activities as a family:

> "*So my mum is a Tswana and my dad is Xhosa. My dad was raised in a Tswana dominated area so we speak Tswana at home because also we* [are] *staying in a Tswana dominated area. So we do identify as Xhosa, but because we were raised in a Tswana area … like we speak Tswana, it's our mother tongue. We don't even know how to speak Xhosa. We only understand a few things but we do have Xhosa names. Everything that we do, we do it according to the Batswana people…*"

The influence of Christian missionaries had a significant impact on some of the participants' inherited cultural religiosity. Participant 15 recalled how, during her childhood, many Christian missionaries were working in the area she grew up in. The missionaries brought the Christian faith and its ceremonial culture and beliefs into their teachings. According to Participant 15's words, the missionaries' teachings were perceived by communities as promoting Christian religious activities more than cultural activities:

> "*So in terms of the traditions, the extremely traditional, very deep traditional ceremonies … probably we don't practise* [as] *much as in terms of my family dynamics. I actually grew up in an area … that kind of came up as a missionary kind of area, so missionaries settled there and then there were houses built around that from our village. So we are much more kind of Christian based and therefore not very involved in the super cultural stuff* [African cultural beliefs] *although obviously, there are some* [African] *tradition* [*sic*] *that we do follow like, for example, boys do get initiated via going to the proper initiation schools etc. and that sort of stuff. But in terms of the* [African] *ancestral kind of aspect to the cultural stuff, we* [are] *not really very much deep into that. And I think it's just as a result of the type, or the type of village if I can put it that way, that we lived in, very much Christian based.*"

4.1.1.4 The threat of non-African cultures

The participants seemed to struggle to find a sense of belonging in their environments. Some ascribed this inner struggle specifically to the fact that they felt obliged to blend their individual culture with diverse cultural environments, especially with that of the white South African culture. Participants shared they had no option but to be 'culturally flexible'. Participant 1 articulated this inner struggle very well:

> "*Because for me, when I was growing up, there was the black culture and then there was the white culture and what was instilled … at least in my home, the value system was 'be proud of your blackness.' Learn the white culture, adapt to the white culture, do things that make people who*

understand the white culture feel comfortable so that you can be accepted, but remember that you are a black girl. And I knew exactly what that meant because I was in a village [where] *everybody was black, everybody was Mpondo.*"

4.1.1.5 Religion

The participants shared that, in their experience, religion has a significant influence on the level of black Africans' adherence to their cultural practices in general. For many participants, culture and religion play a dual role in their lives. The Black African participants did not make reference to any other religion except that of Christianity. Some of the participants acknowledged that, with either their fathers or some other male family members being pastors in a Christian church, it has influenced their devotion to religion more so than their cultural practices. The adherence to Christianity was also a means for African people to receive education in the apartheid era. Among the participants, some said they adhered strictly to religion; others confirmed they adhered to culture *and* religion while the rest admitted they did not ascribe to any religion or cultural beliefs.

Participant 12 described how she and her family live according to the beliefs of Christianity and do not practise any cultural beliefs:

"*I am a Christian and so, well Christianity when it comes to African people to some extent, has different well, not different means but then they practise it differently you know. We have our different views I feel and so with myself and my family, we don't practise traditional* [cultural beliefs] *traditional medicine or ancestral stuff.*"

On the other hand, Participant 25 shared that his lifestyle is very much embedded in the cultural practices that he has grown up with and he doesn't ascribe to any religion:

"*Me, myself* [I] *do not believe in Christianity.*"

Following her own merged religious and culture system, Participant 26 said:

"*So by religion, I am Catholic. And Catholicism doesn't actually deviate or go against cultural beliefs. So within my Christian faith, I am enabled … allowed to be able to practise my cultural faith. So … I guess if we actually had to liken it with Christianity, it would be the same as a baptism because during baptism we actually do the same thing in the Zulu culture where you are introducing the baby to the rest of the clan* [tribe] *and the rest of the family. You are naming the baby and are letting everybody know the child's name and you are also seeking for spiritual protection and then also for the community to guide the child throughout their life. And the only difference is, in the cultural sense, we are doing it from a cultural perspective because we want the clan* [tribe] *to acknowledge the child, to protect the child and to also pave the way for the child in the future. And then from a Christianity perspective, we are asking for spiritual protection and we are asking for a spiritual education, guidance and growth. So the two* [religion and culture] *actually run in parallel.*"

4.2 THE COEXISTENCE OF CULTURE AND RELIGION

Some participants stated adherence to culture and religion exists parallel to each other. This implies that one can practise one's religion (such as Christianity) and then still practise cultural beliefs. For example, one will pray to God but also call on the ancestors and/or practise imphepho. Participant 22 shared the interrelationship between culture and religion:

"*From where I stand, they* [culture and religion] *interrelate very much. So basically, it's very hard to distinguish between culture and religion. So where I'm going with this is basically that Christianity is the religion but from a cultural aspect, they are so interrelated that I cannot draw a distinction between the two … how I live is basically … Christianity with a cultural, with a* [*sic*] *African traditional element to it… You know, there's a lot sort of contention when it comes to what other people think about where Christianity basically stands if you are an African and believe in African traditional sort of way of life. So, from my point of view, they co-exist and they are interrelated, so I'd burn my imphepho and end it with a prayer, you know. Or open with a prayer before speaking to my ancestors. Because the way I believe in things is that God is basically the higher power and the way*

we describe or call God, we call him umvelinqangi [an Nguni word meaning "The Most High referring to God] *that's basically God himself…. So if you were to give an example, ancestors are more like angels that are closer to God so I cannot basically just say,I'll just believe in my ancestors … that would be wrong because there is also a God and this is the same God that all Christians believe in.*"

The other view presented by some of the participants is that religion and culture actually clash and simply cannot coexist. Over the years, as Christianity spread among black Africans and their acceptance of and adherence to the Christianity faith grew, the Christian church reprimanded worshippers. They were to abandon cultural practices and stay within the Christian doctrines. Among others, this doctrine disapproves of communication with ancestors; personal and societal problems should only be addressed to God. This is represented in the statement Participant 2 made:

"*It's a tough one* [to communicate only with God]. *It's really a tough one especially being an African person. You know, being a Christian there are certain things that we are told not to do … according to the Bible we* [are] *told, okay, Jesus Christ died for our sins, when He was being* [*sic*] *on the Cross, certain things had to stop, you know he didn't bleed for nothing … He bled for us so that we can be saved and stuff like that so the stuff* [communication with ancestors, bringing offerings etc.] *that we used to do previously we mustn't do anymore, you know, that's on the religion* [*sic*] *side we* [are] *told. … Now, you just focussing* [*sic*] *on God, everything that you need, you just ask God and He will provide for you and everything.*"

Many participants explained that they were in a constant personal struggle to find a way to blend their Christian religiosity with their traditionally cultural upbringing. Such disagreements usually occurred when their family members remained true to their cultural practices while the Christian approach views such practices as taboos. This situation brought much confusion to participants who, on the one hand needed and wanted to conform to their families' repeated pleadings, while on the other hand, the participants desired to also stay true to the church's admonitions that there is no need to follow such practices. Participants found this dilemma frustrating. Their family's accusations that something bad had occurred in the participants' lives because the

latter had abandoned their cultural practices simply aggravated the dilemma. When the family insisted that a traditional ancestral ceremony must be performed to rectify the participant's straying from her or his culture, its impact on the participant's lifestyle is momentous as Participant 2 confirms:

> "*Okay then comes … the family part, then it becomes a problem*." [Laughs]. "*Because now the Church says, 'okay, don't do certain things … and then our culture will be … we need to … do a ceremony, maybe like a thanksgiving ceremony where we slaughter chickens … and then inviting* [*sic*] *our ancestors and stuff like that or maybe a person would have a dream saying that 'you know, I dreamt' … maybe my late gran* [grandmother] *saying that maybe she's cold, or she's hungry or whatever, and then we need to do a ceremony … like we slaughter* [a chicken or an animal such as a cow] *and we do the traditional beer and all that stuff. So those are things that the* [Christian] *religion says we must not confine* [believe] *in, like we shouldn't do* [it], *but now the family will be like, ' let's do these things' … or you find a person saying, 'you know what, things are going wrong in your life because you stopped doing the traditional stuff', which is your cultural stuff which is … maybe once in a while, slaughtering a cow or a goat or whatever just to thank your ancestors for being alive or … acknowledging them, that they still exist, such things. So … they'll say, 'okay maybe you stopped doing those things, that is why things are going wrong in your life' and now, you* [are] *caught in between …"*

4.3 EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CULTURAL ADHERENCE

During the interviews, insightful data emerged from the participants' communication as regards external factors that influence the reality and importance of cultural practices practised by black Africans.

4.3.1 Urbanisation

Certain characteristic cultural practices that have been handed down over centuries to the indigenous Black African people who have inhabited SA for generations are being replaced more and more by modernised versions of these traditional ways of

living. For example, the participants spoke about how the tradition of the 'bride's price' (lobola) has evolved from being paid in only cows to being paid in money today. Paying in cash is therefore not frowned upon but quite acceptable. According to the participants, the reason why a bride's father nowadays may prefer to be paid in cash is urbanisation. It is understandable that black Africans who live in urban areas or close to big towns do not have space on their property (this may be restricted as per residential policies) to where they can keep livestock. Hence, cash is preferred as Participant 24 explained:

> "*There's still lobola that is paid and as a male,* [for] *example on my side when I got married, I was going to pay lobola. Like back in the* [olden] *days, you'd have cows right, they would lobola with cows. Real actual breathing cows, right. In today's life, those cows are referred to as cash, money, so we still perform the sort of like the same practice but it's just that we don't have live cows, we just have money now … so it's the same sort of practice, it's just that now … we present* [buy the bride] *with cash.*"

When people move from rural to urban areas, it is inevitable that they will start to adapt to a more modern way of life. The same applies to the Black African populace. Any new environment has an impact on cultural practices; moving from a rural settlement to an urban area does indeed contribute to change people's previous perceptions and views of life, thus it will change one's previous rigid adherence to cultural practices to perhaps a lesser degree of strictness. The participants shared that black Africans do try to fit into the new urban environment. For example, they tend to hide their beads and isphandlas –especially if no one else is wearing it–so that they can 'fit in' as Participant 22 stated:

> "*But, what I've come to realise is in a place like Jo'burg* [the city Johannesburg]*, a lot of the people come from rural places where cultural, African cultural beliefs are very predominant … what I've come to realise, even though people come from those places, when they start entering the workplace, they start, I'd say 'actively' or 'adapting' to your* Sandton [an affluent city area close to Johannesburg] *life or your more modern way of life or whatever the case is. Not to say that it has altered their belief, I just feel like the environment itself sort of dampens that strong cultural sense*

that you'd get there in the rural areas you know… I've sort of seen maybe one or two people with Isiphandla at work. It's not a lot considering … the number of African … cultural believers at work. You know, I'd say maybe they are more modernised or they [are] *trying to fit in and basically hide whatever they are wearing* [to show their cultural stance]."

4.3.2 Returning to cultural roots

Some of the participants acknowledged they began to reintroduce and actually perform their traditional cultural practices as they grew older. Their reasons varied. Some ascribed this return to the old ways as part of their own journey to self-discovery and a reconnection with their African roots; others admitted seeking and finding their culture via choice as opposed to being forced into it by family members or communities as had happened when they were younger Urbanisation gave them a sense of displaying their own free will. Participant 32 observed that a growing call for people to return to their heritage and cultural roots has been noticeable over the last few years:

"*So what has happened in our generation as a whole, is those of us who have parents that were very religious or Christian by nature, have felt a lot of pressure because everything* [every one] *in our generation is talking about 'going back to your roots'; 'going back to your heritage'; 'don't be like our parents who lost themselves to Western society' for lack of a better way of putting it. So many in that generation* [parents' generation; previous generations]*, and especially towards the younger end* [modern generation or people] *in the bid to go back to their roots have adopted practices their families never had, if that's the way to put it.*"

4.3.3 Review the relevance of cultural practices

The relevance of certain cultural practices was questioned by some of the participants as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, with the restrictions imposed by the lockdown regulations, in particular the numbers of people who are allowed to attend a funeral, many funerals have been taking place in a shorter timespan because mortuaries cannot cope with the number of bodies. This significantly reduced the time off from work that black Africans would need to take if they had to attend the funeral

rites of all the deceased they knew. In the opinion of Participant 29 it was very clear that some African cultural practices needed to be reviewed:

> "*I think as Africans, we need to go back to the drawing board and actually understand because things are no longer done as they used to be done* [a] *long time ago. Then we had the pandemic which changed the dynamics. Are we saying* [or] *so we need to say, 'go back and say* [it's] *okay, whether the funerals are going back to the normal, the normal where anyone and everyone can* [could] *attend? Are we going to go back and slaughter* [and cook for the whole village when there is a funeral]? *What have we learnt in terms of the culture, the traditions, now with the pandemic?' … for me, I think there should be discussions when it comes to those traditions and cultural beliefs especially because we have seen that when the morgues were full, people were getting buried in less than a week. So when you had COVID* [when a family member or friend died in the time of COVID but not necessarily as a result of it; it could be an accident that resulted in death]*, it* [the funeral proceedings] *was with* [for] *two days. So the 10 days of leave you wouldn't have needed because the dead body was from the hospital or the morgue to the house and then to the graveyard so in actual fact there was no period of* [for a] *prolonged* [funeral] *to say, 'okay, you go and arrange'; 'you go and do this'; 'go buy a cow, get people to come and slaughter* [it]*, 'wait for people that are coming from across the country to come for the funeral'… So yeah, I think quite a number of things needs to be reconsidered or reviewed.*"

4.4 CONCLUSION

It is evident from the information shared by the participants, that various factors contribute to the manner in which an individual manifests their cultural beliefs. These factors mould the Black African and contribute to adherence or non-adherence to culture. In the next chapter, black Africans' beliefs in the 'unseen'–their perceptions towards ancestors, traditional healing, and witchcraft will be analysed.

CHAPTER 5:
THEME 2: BLACK AFRICANS' BELIEFS IN THE 'UNSEEN'

Age-old inherited cultural traditions and beliefs govern the daily lives of indigenous Africans. It is part of their identity and cannot be separated from what they do or who they are. Their culture is not something tribal people 'have' or an 'attribute'. From birth cultural traditions and beliefs form part of 'who they are' as it emphasises black Africans' group affiliations and identities.

5.1 BELIEF IN ANCESTORS

Their unwavering belief in the 'unseen' has a huge influence on their lifestyle and overall health of thousands of black Africans. The belief in 'that which cannot be seen' contributes immensely to sculpt black Africans' identities in their professional lives. The spillover of Black African employees' belief in the powers of their ancestors, traditional healing, and witchcraft into the formal workplace influence the workforce performance, company or organisation's economic growth, and subsequently the South African labour market.

All the participants acknowledged their ancestors as those family members who, although they died hundreds of years ago, continue to play a key role in securing the well-being of their descendants from generation to generation. The participants confirmed their steadfast belief that their ancestors are always present thus including in the workplace.

5.1.1 Presence of the ancestors

The participants admitted that their ancestors are always with them–wherever they go and whatever they do, their ancestors are constantly by their side. The participants' firm belief that their ancestors were fully present in their way of life and living was tangible throughout many of the interviews. Participant 6 shared an incident that happened at work when a candidate's application was declined. As she walked away, the candidate made a comment about the presence of her ancestors which made her very happy. He said to her, "*Yoh, you are so lucky; your ndlozi's* [ancestors] *are so strong*." Participant 6 described her joy as follows:

> "*So for me … it's just a confirmation of that because I believe that the ancestors are with me. So someone else recognising them as well, to say, 'yes, they are here with me and you know they are strong', they are very present*."

Participant 34 dispelled the general perception that, because black Africans are aware of the constant presence of their ancestors in their daily lives, it is connected to some kind of religious worshipping. She stated that, although she undoubtedly believes in God as the "*superior being*" and *"higher power*", she at the same acknowledges the key role her ancestors play in her life. Participant 34 saw her ancestors only as relatives who once lived in this world and are now her guardian angels, but she is still of the Christian faith:

> "*I know that there is a superior being, I know that there is a God. I know that I pray to God. Like there is nothing that I do and I do not pray for God's protection, for God's guidance. … I acknowledge my ancestors … I acknowledge that they are with me. … In Christianity* [*sic*] *terms what they will call a guardian angel, for me those are my ancestors. Those are the people that once lived in this world … obviously I'm related to them, but now they are out there as my guardian angels*."

5.1.2 Communication with ancestors

Communication with their forefathers is very important, especially when the descendants experience difficult times. According to the participants, their ancestors fulfil various roles in their daily existence – in the way they live at home and the way they operate when at work. Participant 5 gave an example of thanking ancestors for their protection in daily life:

> "*So, for instance, if you had a small car accident or if you had a major car accident you would phahla* [shortened form of *ukuphahla* referring to a small ritual that allows one to communicate with their ancestors], *in other words, have a communication with* [a ceremony to thank] *your ancestors.*"

Different rituals and ceremonies are used to communicate with the ancestors, e.g., body cleansing rituals and ceremonial offerings. Participant 4 added:

> "*So, when you neglect it* [the cleansing ceremonies] *I think they* [the ancestors] *also move away from you a bit…*"

The ancestors want to be honoured and shown the ultimate respect. One must therefore perform rituals to communicate with the ancestors as noted by Participant 5:

> "*A common practice is also known as ukhuphahla which I could translate loosely into English* [as] *just means* [meaning] *you are requesting or you are communicating with your ancestors. ... You would prepare a small amount of umqombothi, the traditional beer, you would then also buy what is known as snuif, which is tobacco in a container and also then slaughter an animal. You aren't inclined* [expected] *off course to slaughter and you could then for instance burn incense and speak to your ancestors*."

5.1.3 Communication with ancestors in the workplace

Most importantly, the participants agreed that their ancestors assist them with obtaining employment, giving guidance, providing protection, and act as intercessors when people pray. All participants agreed when they have to make personal or career decisions, their ancestors have to be consulted. Seeking the blessings of the ancestors is the first and most important step that indigenous black Africans take when looking for a job. Participant 28 explained:

> "*When … seeking employment, that's when they start to communicate with the ancestors. They tell their ancestors, 'my grandfather, my grandmother, look after me, I am now going out to seek employment. Give me good luck' and you go.*"

In the formal workplace sector Black African employees invariably constitute the bulk of its workforce. Working in a workplace with a Westernised culture where neither co-workers nor management understand indigenous African employees' inherited cultural beliefs and practices, was traumatic for these employees. Considering that black employees descend from nine indigenous tribes, each with its own sociocultural beliefs and traditions aggravates the problem to accommodate the multitude diverse cultures (in terms of race, language, age, gender, and educational levels) in the legalities, rules, and regulations that guide

the workplace culture. Participant 22, who had gone through a very difficult time at work, expanded on this point:

> "*You know, South Africa is a very diverse country but at the same time … when I needed all the support I could get, it was not as easy having these conversations with my superiors, mainly because I felt like they didn't know enough, that even if they wanted to try to help, they wouldn't know how to help* …"

Some participants claimed because of their spirituality they are attuned to warnings from their ancestors who are their protectors. Participant 7 shared the way she listened to her spiritual voice:

> "*If I feel that my energy is not aligned, I work from home or if I feel something is heavy* [evil, bad, negative] *at the office or somebody is sick or somebody's parents are going to die, I walk away. I don't go to them and tell them that. I actually really just let my boss know that I'm going home, I send him a text, that I'm going to be there, working from home, and then I shoot off.*"

Participant 28 also mentioned that if he has a problem at work, he will first inform the ancestors about it and seek their assistance:

> "*You,* [I, Participant 28] *before you* [I] *go tell your* [my] *boss about it, you* [I] *burn your* [my] *incense and tell your* [my] *ancestors, 'listen, I'm going to talk to my boss about this, my ancestors, make my boss understand me. Make peace and harmony between myself and my boss'.*

Participant 26, a highly educated participant, perceived ancestral warnings in a more logical way:

> "*You could also be sensing that there is some element of danger … as you know as humans we also have a sixth sense, so it could be your heightened sixth sense that is also cautioning you, that listen, 'there is something dangerous or something of danger that is encroaching around you and that you need to be aware of it or you need to be just extra alert.'*"

5.1.4 Thanking ancestors for blessings

Participant 28 emphasised the first and most important thing to do when receiving a blessing is to honour the ancestors for it:

> "*You get the job, now you have to come back and say thank you … If you believe it was your grandfather who gave you the job then you slaughter the goat, and you put the isiphandla [wrist band made of animal hide]*."

When the ancestors have blessed someone and the person does not show gratitude, the consequences will be dire for the individual and probably for the family as well. In this regard, Participant 4 shared the following:

> "*Also if you get a job … it's always a good thing to slaughter, maybe a chicken if you don't have a lot of money or slaughter a goat or anything just to thank your ancestors for all that they've done for you and the blessings they give you because it's believed that when ancestors keep on blessing you, and you don't recognise them for it, then bad luck follows or they take away what they've given to you.*"

5.1.5 Ancestors expect to be informed when changing cultural practices for work reasons

The participants told me part of their cultural heritage to honour their ancestors is to inform the latter beforehand when something at work occurs that forces a person to stop a cultural practice. If this expectation is not met, it will inevitably result in the ancestors pouring out their wrath on you or your family because it shows complete disrespect for their guidance and blessings.

Participant 7 expands on this deference to the ancestors. She said initiates (people training to be sangomas) have to get up in the morning earlier than usual, burn imphepho first, and then inform the ancestors that they have to go to work where using the attire of an initiate is not allowed:

> "*… you have to burn imphepho and say why you have to take it off izdwabo sakho off which is the skirt like* [a] *traditional dress* [traditional skirt-like dress worn by female initiates] … *and then you state the reasons… "I have to do*

such and such because I have to go to work' [and also] *when I had to wash out the red clay … and then I have to tell the ancestors why we are* [I am] *washing off the clay.*"

5.1.6 Ancestral lineage befuddles the workplace

The issue of an ancestral lineage was raised by Participant 13 who shared this lineage can pose problems for black Africans in the workplace:

"*And now I'm talking of the workplace … there's an element that we don't understand … some people who have ancestors that were of royalty. And those ancestors, they don't want to be under anybody. They don't like to report to anybody. Now if my ancestors are of royalty or I'm spiritual … by being spiritual I have those ancestors that don't want to belong or don't want to report to* [others] *under a position of power.*"

According to Participant 13, in the ancestral world some ancestors are deemed more royal – thus having more sovereign powers – than others. These ancestors disapprove of reporting to a human being who is protected by ancestors with lesser powers than the "royal" ancestors. Participant 13 shared that he could not understand why his director, who was in a much more senior position and higher qualified than him, felt so threatened and intimidated by a junior employee that he eventually fired Participant 13:

"*I remember when I got fired at work, my director felt threatened with* [by] *me. And this* [was] *a person who has worked and is highly qualified and I couldn't understand why he felt threatened and had issues with me. And the result of that is that my ancestors are bigger* [stronger; more powerful] *than his ancestors, so he felt overwhelmed by my spirit. My spirit intimidated* [the director]."

Participant 13 learned that the director's ancestors felt threatened by his (Participant 13's) ancestors who were more powerful than those of the director. This phenomenon cannot be understood in the real world; it can only be understood in a spiritual way which is the way in which the ancestors operate. Participant 13 explained:

> "*So … even though physically it doesn't make sense, spiritually it makes sense. … It's because of the power that I have. … And a lot of spiritual people, they are experiencing that problem. They have issues with the people that they report to, and when you look at it closer, that issue is more spiritual and not physical because these people are highly qualified, they are the bosses, why will they not like an ordinary employee? It boils down to the ancestors of that boss and the ancestors of that ordinary worker. They are not the same…*"

Participant 4 added he sometimes had to "*go to the ocean*" if he wanted to appease his ancestors because "… *sometimes ancestors also* [experience] *conflict, so they fight amongst* [*sic*] *themselves … you are asked to tell them, 'I leave you* [all] *here in the ocean, please don't follow me'.*"

Consequently, in a workplace it is possible for a person who is in senior position may feel oppressed or suppressed by the presence of the junior employee if the latter has, without being aware of it, a stronger spirit owing to this ancestral royal lineage.

5.2 TRADITIONAL HEALING

Traditional healing practices are pivotal in black Africans' indigenous belief systems. Hence, it was essential to highlight these practices during the individual interviews. It was of great importance to gain knowledge of the role that traditional healing plays in their daily lives, and how it spills over into their work lives and impact on their performance as an individual or part of a team.

The participants were all employees in a Western-oriented workplace. It was imperative for the purpose of the study to obtain in-depth data on the participants' belief in sangomas as traditional healing practitioners. I had to understand the uniquely inherited relationship that exists between indigenous Africans and sangomas. It is, after all, in sangomas and their traditional practices that their very existence as black indigenous Africans has for millennia, and is still today, cemented. Sangomas are believed to address and heal physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual problems through healing processes that involve divination and herbal medicines.

5.2.1 Belief in sangomas as traditional healers

Discussions around the issue of their belief in sangomas elicited various reactions from the participants. Most participants said a sangoma understands how the African human mind works. They have the power to heal problems stemming from psychosocial illnesses as well as for divination and counselling about familial and work-related problems. Sangomas diagnose, prescribe, and heal through customised rituals to cure illness and restore well-being to individuals and communities.

The perception towards sangomas was that most participants believed sangomas were good and had healing powers whilst a few seemed to have doubts as to whether sangomas did only good deeds; they contemplated on whether sangomas were also involved in bad/evil practices.

Participant 15 confessed that owing to her strong Christian background, she did not believe in sangomas. But, her perception changed when her best friend became a sangoma. Of significance in Participant 15's answer, is that when she acknowledged that sangomas were inherently good people who wanted to help others, it did not change her religiosity as a Christian. What did change was her view of the worth of sangomas in people's lives and their understanding thereof:

> "*You know what, if you had asked me this* [whether she believed in sangomas] *before my best friend basically became a sangoma, I would have said, 'no, there's no such thing' … But obviously, after the experiences that she's* [Participant 15's friend had] *gone through as a sangoma … I mean this person, I know this person personally, why should she lie about there being the existence of this other world and, according to her … you know there's a very fine line between good and evil in the spiritual realm. I think we all have an appreciation of that. So, now I do think, it is possible.*"

Participant 22 believed in the healing powers of sangomas as opposed to Western medicinal cures because he experienced it himself:

> "*… there are certain things that Western medication cannot do to help, they couldn't even diagnose as to what was wrong with you* [me] *… and I just*

needed a traditional healer [sangoma] *to help me out. And here today, I am fine again*."

Participant 26 admitted that "*before there was Western medicine, if I was sick, I would have gone to consult a sangoma*". Although she had apparently decided to make use of Western medicine for herself, she definitely believed there is a specific positive role sangomas fulfil in the community because they understand how to communicate with ordinary people on ground level:

> "*So you would go to them* [sangomas] *and you would express to them, 'I have been having these scary dreams and this is what is happening in my dream'. And then they would probably diagnose that as anxiety, but we just don't have such a word in our language … and they'd give you a proper therapeutic consultation … to try and understand what has changed your dreams …*"

Adding that "*sangomas were actually our traditional psychologists or psychiatrists*", Participant 26 showed the insight she had of the significant role sangomas fulfil in Black African communities. Participant 26 was also totally aware that ordinary Black African citizens were not educated enough to understand words like "*anxiety*". However, sangomas could explain their mental health in a plain and understandable way, in that "*it's because you're actually highly worried or highly sensitive to something that's happening to you*".

In Participant 22's opinion, "… *there's a few, only a handful of people that actually believe that a sangoma is there to do good in the world*…" while Participant 4 seemed sceptical about sangomas' healing abilities. He perceived the belief in sangomas applied more to the older generations and he questioned sangomas' way of practising their work:

> "*So it's a lot, there's always a ceremony for something and somehow when you go to a sangoma, they always have an explanation and something that you need to do. Sometimes it is helpful, sometimes you see the difference and sometimes … you just do it for the sake of it being a belief and because also the older generation really still believes intensely in it*."

5.2.2 Different perceptions of the role of a sangoma

Most participants viewed the role of sangomas as related to healing. If a person is sick, she or he visits a sangoma for healing purposes. Having the gift of being a clairvoyant, sangomas are able to inform you about something that will happen in the future. Sangomas also play a key role in communication with the ancestors. Subsequently, the general negativity that surrounds the term 'sangomas' and the kind of 'services' they provide to indigenous black Africans was upsetting to a lot of the participants.

Participant 22 ascribed the Western view of sangomas as being bad, evil, and involved in witchcraft to ignorance and misinterpretation of the role sangomas has played in indigenous Black African cultures for centuries. Society tends to negate sangomas' engagement in acts of good and healing. Participant 22 reported on this issue as follows:

> "*The stigmatisation that's associated with traditional healers, the bad element, the witchcraft … I feel like* [the] *majority of people, that's how they normally see traditional healers in South Africa … whether they are basically misinformed, but I feel it's like how people see traditional healers in South Africa.*"

Several participants expounded on the fact that there is a major difference between a witch and a sangoma. They emphasised that it is critical to understand the differences in the "good" role sangomas fulfil in society and the "evil" that witchcraft brings. Sangomas are consulted when people are in need of good help whereas witchcraft brings evil that harms people and families. Participant 18 confirmed it as follows:

> "*And sangoma is* [are] *there to help people and the witch is there to destroy others, to kill others. And usually, people go to sangomas when they need help. Either they are sick or they need promotion … [a] sangoma will help. And good sangomas, I think they fully help these people… Witches are those people you go to if you want to kill Zeenat [name of the researcher] so you can take Zeenat's position … but sangomas are good, I will classify them as good people although there are some bad ones.*"

Some black Africans fear sangomas because they tend to misunderstand what a sangoma actually does. This has an impact on how black Africans practise their ancestral beliefs. They feel embarrassed and do not speak about their belief in the healing powers of sangomas because of the fear of being judged. Participant 10 shared:

> "*Even some black people … they fear sangomas. I was one of those that feared them my whole life, from childhood … because I didn't understand it* [their positive powers]. *Only … in the last six years, did I start to be curious and ask questions and engage with it* [sangomas and their role] *and talk to one* [to] *understand what the beads mean, what different things mean, why do we do that. …. If I have* [had] *had this conversation with you ten years ago, I'd probably would* [*sic*] *have said it's all evil, that stuff is nonsense … Because of … how we were raised and … just a fear of the unknown.*"

The participants also shared that visiting a sangoma is seen as a bad omen and those who visit sangomas are shunned by others as Participant 1's reply indicated:

> "*I guess it differs from village to village, but in my town of XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity] *it is frowned upon, it is seen as satanic; it is beneath everyone. It's like … you really get shunned. You get shunned, your relatives shun you … you get disowned by some families …*"

Participant 11 shared that as a black African, she has some reservations about people who consult with sangomas as she feels that they are engaging in witchcraft. However, at the same time she acknowledges that there is a fine line between practising witchcraft and consulting a sangoma. Participant 11's greatest fear was that someone might, at some time, be trying to destroy her life:

> "*I think in African culture or in black culture, the moment you are made aware of this person* [who] *wears this particular thing, you automatically think that they are into witchcraft. There's a very thin line between witchcraft and just generally consulting … a sangoma … the lines get a bit blurred and you start to think that, 'okay, in Zulu* [isiZulu] *they'll say uyaloya so this person is using witchcraft'. I mean … you could easily catch the flu and you'll*

automatically think this person is doing this to me. Especially when you don't have such a good … relationship with that particular person, maybe it's in your department … or maybe things are not going well for you and you just automatically assume that it's someone who's negatively impacting your life or trying to destroy you in some way."

5.2.3 Calling to become a sangoma

The participants provided interesting information as regards the phenomenon known as 'the calling to become a sangoma'. Answering such a calling brings about a lot of changes and perhaps complications in the life of one who has been called. Special training is needed to prepare the one who has been called to eventually achieve the status of a sangoma.

5.2.3.1 Signs of the calling

The participants described that the calling to be trained as a sangoma manifests in various ways, but it is always an extremely personal experience.

Participant 13 worked in the corporate business area when he finally realised he too had been receiving the calling since childhood. While at university, he had "*prophetic dreams*" centring on, e.g., "*someone who will have an accident and that person will be in an accident after a week or two"*. After years struggling with these dreams and getting no answers, he eventually acquired the help of a friend who helped him to understand he had been called by his ancestors from a young age. He then had a dream of a man with noticeable scars who approached him. Participant 13 verbalised what followed:

"*So he introduced himself as my grandfather and he was the person who was responsible in* [for] *making me have these dreams. So I went to my dad … to ask him, 'who looks like this and that in the family?' My grandfather had bodily scars that was* [were] *visible so my dad … he was surprised because I've never seen a picture of my grandfather before. So he admitted that … it was my grandfather and how do I know this? So, I told him that I had a dream about him. … And then I last saw him when I was given an ultimatum to accept the calling. My daughter was in ICU* [the intensive care

unit in a hospital] *and the doctors couldn't see anything wrong* [with her]*. And she was on life support basically. So after that, I accepted my calling while she was still in hospital because I kept having dreams that 'if you are not accepting this calling, then you will lose your child'. So after that I thought to myself, then I accepted the calling immediately and she never went to hospital again*."

Usually, an undiagnosed illness can actually indicate that the person has been called; strange ongoing dreams and experiencing a feeling of being unsettled or anxious may be experienced. People who are called upon to be trained as a sangoma experience physiological symptoms and are often booked off sick from work by Western medical doctors, or they take sick leave to visit traditional healers. Participant 3 attested to this phenomenon:

"[But] *what happened, this particular employee, because of their* [her] *ancestral calling, they* [she] *was experiencing physiological reactions,* they [she] *was sick, like most of the time the employee was booked off. … And in the time of the consultation with the inyanga and everything, the employee was booked off for about a month.*"

In the case of Participant 4, the calling can continue for years until the person who experiences the calling eventually discovers that he or she is being called. For example, growing up in a strict traditional Zulu family, Participant 4 was a sickly child; who was in and out of hospitals on a regular basis. Participant 4 told me the community ascribed his poor health to him being called from a very young age. In his words:

"*I come from a family that's like strictly traditional so I also needed to abide by that, especially with the calling that they said I have … I've gotten sick a lot, growing up, being a sickly child; being in and out of hospitals.*"

It was only after Participant 4 started working, that he answered his calling. He commented on this situation by saying that sometimes he became so sick, it was impossible to focus on both his work and his calling. He thought "*the employer might not understand*".

Having no support at work, people who answer their calling and are forced to be productive at work while simultaneously having to deal with their own illnesses, anxieties, and fears of the unknown alone can lead to them feeling guilty at work, as Participant 4 mentions:

> "*Because I can't always explain to the employer or a senior that, 'no, it's traditional … it's traditional' because it won't always make sense for me to say 'it's traditional'. So sometimes I'll tell them that I'm just not feeling well or because that's the only* [thing to say], *'I am not feeling well but I can't tell you, I can't go into depth as to why I'm not feeling well, why my shoulders are heavy*…'

5.2.4 The tug of war between the workplace and the calling

According to the inputs from the participants, when an employed person responds to her or his ancestors' calling to become a sangoma, it causes havoc in the formal workplace. It raises concern in the organisation because of the long times taken off work, including periodic times off work to attend or perform ceremonies, rituals, and offerings.

5.2.4.1 Long times taken off work to attend training

In the process of becoming a sangoma (known as *ukhutwasa)* the training can take between six to eight months or even a year. Employees generally ask for three to six months' time off to attend to their calling. In the business environment a situation like this does not benefit the organisation. Consequently, instead of being shown respect or being supported, many employees are forced to resign because employers do not understand the importance of the calling and therefore, they are not afforded time off from work.

Participant 31 agreed that in the workplace there is no understanding or support from management or colleagues for an employee who answers the calling:

> "*So … this close friend of mine … had a calling to become a … traditional healer. … So that specific friend … did not get a lot of support from the firm because they are like, 'No, but we can't, we can't give you a break, what's*

going to be happening in your role?' You know, it's either you quit and then do your training … and they were like, 'We can't wait for you, work has to go on'. And she ended having to quit, do her thing and then after that … look for a job whilst practising as a sangoma."

Participant 26 also mentioned she is aware of a friend of hers who had to take a six-month sabbatical to deal with her calling before she returned to work:

"*There's one lady that I know of and she is a XXXX* [title deleted for anonymity]… *and she had to take a sabbatical for her to go to initiation school and I think she took six months off work, before she was able to come back*."

5.2.4.2 Suffering of the employee who answers the calling

The employee who answers the calling suffers from psychosomatic illnesses caused by stress and anxiety. They fear the unknown because they do not know that they are receiving a calling and Western medical doctors cannot diagnose them. Concomitantly, the fear of losing their job or suffering from exhaustion caused by training to be a sangoma and working at the same time can overwhelm them physically and mentally.

Not attending to your calling has dire physiological consequences on the person as well as on her or his relationship with the workplace. If one ignores this calling, the ancestors distance themselves from the individual. Participant 4 became frustrated and suffered much anxiety to balance his cleansing and time-consuming rituals while still being productive at his job. His frustration and inner struggle were heightened by the fact that he worried that his employers would not believe him:

"*So now I just have ceremonies every now and then and as I get sick, I go to a waterfall to cleanse or I have a ceremony where I slaughter a goat, just to appease them* [the ancestors] *and tell them I am still going to get time, because it's very difficult to do this, especially since I am at work and I tried to go and do as much as I could … So it's difficult.*"

Participant 4 told me he was starting to feel like a liability in the workplace because his colleagues did not take his calling seriously:

> "*So as much as you can explain … they'll never truly know what you've been going through to the extent that you want them to … you can also start feeling like you are a liability to the workplace…*"

Participant 4 took unpaid leave to attend to his calling. As a young Black African from a disadvantaged family, taking unpaid leave was an impossibility which he did not even consider. On the other hand, he also felt that he could not expect the company to pay for his time away when he was not bringing in any money for the company. This is how he described his predicament:

> "*But … if you take leave for three months, then obviously it's going to be unpaid leave and so, as a young person coming from a disadvantaged family that doesn't have a lot, that's not an option … and I don't think it would be fair to expect any company to pay you for six months, just for you to go* [and] *work on your calling and you not billing anything to the firm*."

Participant 22 embroidered on his experience at the time of his calling. He advised that he was in a constant state of anxiety and feeling uncomfortable that his managers would not believe him mainly because he had no physical proof like a medical certificate to prove his claim that he had been called:

> "*I had that constant fear of not being believed because I just felt that my managers did not know enough about what I was going through. … It was just very blank and the constant fear of not being believed in; especially once I had my medical checks and there was nothing wrong with me.*"

5.2.4.3 Legislative measures in terms of leave and remuneration

Another concern expressed by the participants was that legislative measures contained in The Constitution and Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 on aspects such as leave, remuneration, medical aid, and so forth are vague. Two major dilemmas that employed people who answer their calling face are associated with their sick and annual leave situation and the impact on their financial position.

Before realising one is being called, this calling manifests in the person experiencing a strange ongoing illness. He/she will make use of their sick leave days to visit Western doctors in an attempt to find out what exactly is causing their ongoing "illness." The employee thus uses up many days of his/her allocated sick leave days or exhausts their sick leave days. Consequently, the person then has to take days off his/her annual leave – or the remainder thereof – for itwasa which can last between six to eight months. When sick leave and annual leave is exhausted, unpaid leave has to be taken. According to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997, an employee is entitled to 36 days of sick leave in a 3-year cycle and 15 days of annual leave per annum (South Africa, 1997).

Considering Participant 31's statement, "*And obviously that* [training process] *requires that you go to a specific place. You live there in some instances. … You must not work; you must make sure that you are a full-time student of this traditional calling that you've received"*, it is clear that both the time taken off work and the financial aspects are dilemmas that have to be sorted out by the employer as well as the employee.

A major problem is when an employee working in one area or province has to relocate to another province to attend to the calling. This was a major issue raised by various participants because many questions needed answers. For example, how is the workplace supposed to accommodate these employees in terms of salaries, travelling costs, and accommodation?

In the scenario Participant 21 described the scenario of a friend who had to negotiate her time off from work to attend to her calling. Participant 21 said from the company's side questions were asked about what kind of leave 'calling leave' was: "*… and what do we label this leave? Is it annual leave? Is it unpaid leave?*"

Participant 3 provided information from an organisation's perspective on the issues surrounding leave when an employee goes for training as a sangoma. Explaining a case where an employee was experiencing severe physiological illnesses before answering her calling, he recalled:

> "… *and being sick, like most of the time the employee was booked off, you understand. And in the time of the consultation with the inyanga and*

everything, the employee was booked off for about a month. It [the training] *was going to take the whole thirty days that she had in terms of the legislation … So, now* [she] *want* [*sic*] *another six months*…"

Bearing in mind that Participant 10 shared there were instances where employees took chances by saying that they had a calling only to get time off without the employer knowing whether it was true or not, Participant 3's approach to negotiate the "calling leave" so that it benefits both the company (to retain a good employee) and the employee (to answer the ancestral calling) was of significance. Participant 10's company did not offer any special leave in terms of attending to a calling; the company just had to adapt if an employee brought up the issue of a calling:

"*And I think yes, there's the flipside where people take chances, and that happened quite a bit in the organisation that I was in where people would take chances and say they had the calling so that they could get time off, and whether it was true or not, you'll never know right! It would depend on the person's character, so I think again, there's* [are] *two sides to the story*."

It was Participant 3's responsibility to handle the case and he explained how he went about to ascertain that the employee's calling was indeed genuine:

"… *from an HR point of view, I was handling the case … I even had a meeting with the teacher or the principal of the initiation school that she was going to … where she was going to do ukhutwasa at that school. So, it was quite a learning experience for me because you see, you hear this person where they are coming from*."

To accommodate employees who really believed in their calling and wanted to be trained as a sangoma, Participant 3 said he believed negotiation and bargaining to be the best way of managing leave requests:

"… *what we can do to accommodate this person is to use their leave, their annual leave and after using their annual leave, to bring them back and maybe, instead of working the full day, with the help of the line manager they can then work half days*."

In the case of the honest employee who required six more months, Participant 3 explained how he approached her request with the help of the line manager:

> "*What we agreed on* [was] *to say the employee would use annual leave and she had more than twenty-two days. So she went on annual leave, and when the annual leave ended, we did an unpaid leave for the period of two months.*"

Participant 3 subsequently bargained with the employee that the company would give her the requested leave as well as undertake to continue to pay benefits like medical aid, pension, and her provident fund while she was in training. However, upon her return to she would be liable to repay these monies. The employee agreed. According to Participant 3, in most cases when employees return to work after attending to their calling, they are highly productive as he confirmed in the case of this female employee:

> "*And it worked out, the employee came back and indeed, the employee was healed and the employee was productive,* [she] *was no longer troublesome in the workplace, was no longer fainting and all those stuff.*"

According to Participant 6, certain organisations have formal policies that govern the calling situation. However, the organisation required some kind of proof that an employee was indeed undergoing the initiation process:

> "*We also required a certificate from the healer that they* [employees answering the calling] *would be under supervision … so we'd* [*sic*] *require a certificate from that person to say … 'this person is undertaking such and such a process, due to start first December and end March'. So … we actually had to refer back to legislation to say what does the law say around even medical certificates because … the thing is we couldn't say, 'no, you can't do it because the law has said…' We need to recognise traditional healers as well in terms of a sick note.*"

At the time of study, no legislation pertinent to training leave to answer the calling was in existence. Such requests were primarily addressed on a case-to-case basis as Participant 6 informed me: "*So it was also for us to say, 'okay, maybe the previous*

person was given unpaid leave, but can we motivate for special leave if we are able to and we were able to." Hence, it remains the employers' decision to grant such a request.

5.2.4.4 Sick notes issued by a traditional healer

The participants said that sick notes issued by a traditional healer are accepted at some workplaces, but most employers prefer a sick letter from a Western doctor and not one issued by a traditional healer. Participant 3 voiced that a sick letter from a traditional healer is not regulated and needs further verification. He recounted an incident when someone brought "*a piece of paper you know like, they just wrote the paper and sent it to the organisation...*" He doubted its validity and requested the people to get a council number: "*They went back and they met my organisational requirements to say they are aligned with their council* [Traditional Healers Council] *and everything. It was like a professional paper and then on that note, that's how we managed to proceed*."

Participant 3 told me he had been endeavouring to amend human resource policies in his firm by promoting the acceptance of sick letters or notes from a traditional healer in the workplace policy documents:

> *"So, annually I was updating the HR policies and the leave policy after looking at case law. So I used that as a back-up to my changing of the policy and making this provision to accept sick notes from traditional healers. But … it has to be in consultation with the Employee Relations department. Because … we have to remember, when we talk about inyanga, they are not regulated like the medical professionals. If you are looking at the medical certificate from … a Westernised medical doctor, we all know that it has to have a date, a return date, a practice number … So even with my workplace, where my rule as an XXXX* [title deleted for anonymity]… *was to … peruse the document, see if it's authentic.*"

Participant 3 felt that the same conditions should apply to all employees irrespective of whether they consulted a Western doctor or a traditional healer. The type of medical professional consulted should not make any difference on any level. He reasoned that

time off from work should be treated in the same manner–first deducted from sick leave, then annual leave, and then unpaid leave as verified by his answer:

> "*But I think it's worth noting to say … when I was dealing … with Westernised or cultural cases, I was guided by the company policy to say … that you use your sick leave. After you use your sick leave, you go to your annual leave and when you are done with your annual leave, you automatically go to unpaid leave. So, all employees were going into the same process, there was no saying that you are going to an inyanga therefore I am going to treat you like this, you are going to a Westernised version, I'm going to treat you like this… It's very important … because remember, as much as we talk about diversity in the organisation and we talk about us as South Africans being a rainbow nation, I think the crux of the matter is to … say the same privilege that is afforded to the person that is going to the Westernised doctors must also be afforded to the person who goes to inyangas.*"

5.2.4.5 Discrimination in the workplace against the calling

Several participants felt that Black African employees who receive the calling and choose to answer it suffer discrimination in their places of work. Instead of showing respect for the cultural heritage and beliefs that Black African employees want and need to honour, they are harassed, belittled and discriminated against by junior and senior co-workers as well as the organisation. As aforementioned (see *Section 5.2.4.1*) some employees have to resign to answer their calling because employers do not understand the significance of the calling and therefore they are not afforded time off from work. In the opinion of the participants, the significance of the calling and the importance thereof to thousands of Black African residents are simply non-existent.

Participant 21 witnessed an incident in her workplace that she experienced as both racial and cultural discrimination. She said she was appalled by how co-workers treated an employee who wanted to answer her calling. Instead of treating this knowledge with respect, the colleagues actually thought this employee was simply making up a silly story to take leave. Participant 21 emphasised that when a calling from the ancestors is recognised, it is imperative for the person to answer the calling

otherwise problems and illnesses will continue to make one's home and work life a misery:

> "*We've had an incident where one of the ladies, she claimed that she had a spiritual calling and immediately everyone in the team was like, 'she knows it's a grey area now she wants to take time off … there was so much speculation around that person … I was in the background thinking, 'somebody's talking about a spiritual gift that they have and already they'd assumed that this person had conjured up lies' … it's something that we are aware of … you do need time to get the whole thing done unless you want to continue having problems in your life … is so sad because you can't be open with your employer* [and that] *is another thing, but yeah… she wasn't accommodated.*"

Owing to the diverse sociocultural and ethnic composition of Black African employees (Black African employees descend from 9 different indigenous races each with its own traditions, cultural practices, and beliefs in South Africa) conflict and discrimination arise easily in the workplace.

Participant 31 shared that the reason for such unfair and discriminatory treatment in the workplace is because other culturally different South Africans do not understand the role of a traditional healer but perceive it as purely evil witchcraft:

> "*Sometimes I just think it is not fair because you get people who are offered sabbaticals and stuff like that so I just feel like the fact that people do not understand something and then they tend to disregard it as crap … it's just because it's misunderstood and people don't have* [make] *like a clear distinction between a traditional healer, a sangoma, you know they just think it's like witchcraft of which it's not*."

Participant 22 gave the example of a friend, a traditional healer, who was advised to remove beads she had on her body and to not return to work until this had been removed. Participant 22 believes that not being able to wear isiphandla to the workplace is a violation of one's cultural beliefs:

"*I've definitely heard of a number of people from outside … who have been discriminated* [against]*, who have been stigmatised … a friend of mine … they* [employers] *asking her to remove it* [beads] *and only come back once she's removed it. I know of ample people that have had issues at work, who have been stigmatised … just being a traditional healer or for just exercising their cultural belief … if you saying* [say] *that I cannot wear isiphandla, to me it is a serious, it's a serious violation of my cultural beliefs because I believe that I have to; so if I'm at work and you are saying that I can't do it, it's just an issue* …"

Finally, when in training initiates have to prescribe to a specific dress code which is not always received well in the organisation or company.

5.2.4.6 Sangoma dress code

People who have a calling to become a sangoma are known as initiates and they follow a specific dress code. They wear red and white beads and isiphandla. The red (blood of the slaughtered animal representing the blood of the ancestors) and white (symbolising spiritual purity) beads are worn on both the hands and the ankles. The ocean, water, or river spirits are acknowledged by the wearing of blue and white beads. After attending rituals to become a sangoma, a person has to wear isiphandla and certain beads upon re-entry into the workplace as shared by Participant 26:

"If you've gone through initiation school, there is [are] *also very distinctive beads that you have to wear … they sometimes also have to also wear a red, black and white fabric … some* [sangomas] *are very, very stylish where they'll wear it as a scarf, they will wear it as a belt, you know, they will twist it and wear it as a belt around their clothes and then some would just wear it as a scarf like over the shoulders and stuff like that."*

Initiates wear red clay on their faces and hair. This red mud or clay is mixed with oil and sticky substances and applied to the hair and body. The hair needs to be constantly washed and fresh red clay must be applied daily. Participant 7 said some women found going to work wearing a *doek* [a noun describing a South African headscarf] to cover up the red clay in their hair much easier and faster:

> "*So we had those things and it has to go on your hair, so sometimes you find a lot of the tswasas* [initiate who becomes a traditional healer) *actually wear doeks to the workplace so then you can't see that they have the red clay in their hair because it's red clay mixed with oil mixed with other things and then it sticks to your hair.*"

Evidence from the transcribed data indicated that most initiates take pride in wearing their isiphandla and beads. This is in accordance to the traditional healer who is conducting the training to become a traditional healer, that initiates must look good and maintain a professional image. Participant 7 said her spiritual guide had exposure in the work environment and encouraged Participant 7 to wear her beads, isiphandla, and bangles but to wash off the red clay:

> "*… my gobela, which is my spiritual guide … she would tell me to wash it* [red clay] *off. She said that she comes from a professional workplace … she doesn't want me to look scruffy … she said, 'you must be professional at work, you must dress properly' and the only thing that I wore to work was my … isiphandla … and then my beads. And my bangles, which are my traditional bangles for ukhutwasa*, *that's it.*"

5.2.4.7 Consultations and dual role of sangomas in the workplace

Most participants mentioned that employees consult sangomas primarily for emotionally upsetting work-related problems or for a promotion. Anxiety, depression, and fear of losing their jobs or because they feel culturally alienated may be the driving force behind employees' consultations with sangomas.

Participant 4 was thankful for the support and understanding he received from the company he worked for. Yet, the immense pressure he experienced while dealing with his calling and still having to attend to his duties at work resulted in in him experiencing much illness, anxiety, and fear of the unknown:

> "*In my case, I'm sick almost every month or every two months and as much as I know that people understand, I don't truly believe that it clicks with them … that I am really trying. That it is not easy. That focussing on work and trying to figure this out and also trying to find the solution medically is very difficult.*

> *…Because I have noticed that there was* [were] *occasions where I was told that people don't feel comfortable giving me work because they don't know if I am going to be around often or if something is going to come up* [prevent me from coming to work]."

Several participants were sangomas and had full-time jobs. Their duties as a sangoma they do over weekends or after working hours. The sangomas who are full-time employees want to be seen as just that, full-time employees like all the others and therefore do not demand to be respected as a sangoma while fulfilling their work obligations. Participant 7 shared whenever she feels a misalignment of "energy", she would work from her home and inform her boss accordingly. She tries to avoid being at work if she senses that something negative will happen because she does not want to impose herself on the people in the workplace:

> "*I am not a sangoma in the workplace. I am XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity] *… and when I am at work, I'm at work. I do not consult at work; I don't do any sangoma work at work. … I don't like to kind of, pose or impose myself on people. And when I do feel that there's something that's going to happen, I tend to actually stay home, even somebody's going to be sick, I tend to then work from home."*

Participant 7 acknowledged some colleagues do try to talk to her in an informal way to seek guidance or get information. But she does not view this as necessarily a negative way of "consulting" her; she sees it as a gesture of appreciation from her colleagues:

> "*I generally shy away from assisting colleagues because we are colleagues. Anybody else, if you find me outside of the workplace, yes, perfectly so; but I really shy away from assisting colleagues spiritually and from a healer perspective. But what does happen is when they have* [want] *interviews, they come to my desk, and then they make small talk, trying to see what I'm going to say.*" [Laughs]. "*… or if they are doing something at home, like a traditional ceremony or their people are coming to lobola, they'll come around my desk and, you know, kind of gauge.*"

5.2.4.8 Creating awareness of the calling

According to Participant 22, it is extremely important to create a definite awareness among employers of the significance cultural beliefs have for Black African employees. Such awareness could serve as a platform for collaboration and cooperation to address and deal with cultural situations quite alien to their own cultures. If there is understanding and a knowledge base to work from, the situation where an employee has to respond to a calling will not come as surprise to employers or colleagues. Also, the senior personnel's interpretation that the particular employee cannot fulfil his or her position because of laziness or disinterest or whatever reason will be dispelled.

Participant 22 said some of his acquaintances who were employed at other companies were given time off for a calling because in the companies' regulations and/or policies it was specified that employees were entitled to a four-month-leave period to answer a calling. However, in the company where he worked, he felt as if his employer was "*doing him a favour"* every time they discussed Participant 22's request for time off. He felt uncomfortable about this whole scenario:

> "*I think that's perfectly fine* [to create awareness] *because I feel like that will create a foundation to asking the right questions. When it's actually the time to implement, nobody is confused as to what needs to happen to you now … When I went through this* [the calling experience] *I had … friends at different companies who in their sort of employment contracts and things like that, it's* [written/noted] *… that you are entitled to four months' leave … whether unpaid or not … it's there* [written down in the company files]. *You* [are] *not worried …* [the] *"I don't know what to* do" [feeling that I had] *… because every discussion it's like, "me* [the employer] *doing you* [Participant 22] *a favour" … it's not always nice being in those kinds of situations.*"

Participant 26 shared a story of a colleague that highlighted the importance of educating other people on the role of the sangomas. A senior person at her company went to an initiation school and colleagues were afraid that he may cast spells on them. He was very open about becoming a sangoma and held a session to respond to questions from co-workers about his experience. However, while some attendees felt

at ease after he had shared some significant information, others continued to avoid him and to not engage with him:

> "*He went to initiation school and when he came back to work… it was common knowledge that he had gone to initiation school. And now people were scared that he can cast spells and that he can do certain things to them. So he … had a very open session where he … debunked all those myths and let people know that he is still the same. … He was a very gregarious person … open, charming, outgoing, outspoken and I think it helped that you know before he was always that way so people were always open to asking him questions. … So I think that gave people a sense of comfort in that they didn't feel they should now fear him, but I think there were people that still would rather avoid him than engage with him directly.*"

5.3 WITCHCRAFT

Whereas the term 'sangoma' is generally associated with people who have answered the calling from ancestors to be trained to perform miracles of healing, some sangomas apparently also meddle with evil forces to cause harm and even death. During the interviews I wanted to determine participants' views on this perceived connection between sangomas who 'do good' and sangomas who 'do bad or evil' by making use of witchcraft. It was clear to me from the participants' responses that the possible link between sangomas and witchcraft is what causes black Africans to dislike and distrust sangomas.

Participant 11 shared that as a black African, she had some reservations about people who consult with sangomas as she felt that they are engaging in witchcraft. However, at the same time she acknowledged there is a fine line between practising witchcraft and consulting a sangoma. Participant 11's greatest fear was that someone might, at some time, be trying to destroy her life:

> "*You know, I think in African culture or in black culture, the moment you are made aware of this person* [who] *wears this particular thing* [isiphandla] *you automatically think that they are into witchcraft. There's a very thin line between witchcraft and just generally consulting … a*

sangoma … the lines get a bit blurred and you start to think that, okay, in Zulu [isiZulu] *they'll say uyaloya, so* [meaning] *this person is using witchcraft. I mean … you could easily catch the flu and you'll automatically think this person is doing this to me. Especially when you don't have such a good … relationship with that particular person, maybe it's in your department … or maybe things are not going well for you and you just automatically assume that it's someone who's negatively impacting your life or trying to destroy you in some way."*

5.3.1 Participants' perceptions of witchcraft

During the interviews I also explored witchcraft and the participants' views on how witchcraft is perceived in the workplace. According to them, witchcraft can be performed by a sangoma. Apparently, the effects of witchcraft include possible death, experiencing misfortune and/or an unexplainable illness. Witchcraft is called upon when one wants some form of harm done to others to prevent them from prospering as explained by Participant 5:

"*The other side of traditional* [healing] *is known as ukuloya* [isiZulu] *… translated* [into] *English it is witchcraft … it's known as ukuloya which is a belief or the idea or the concept that you use to bring about bad situations or implications for some people. It's completely mystical in that you'd find that, for* [in] *some instances some people are believed to be bewitched.*"

Participant 31 summarised the feeling of resentment among the participants when witchcraft was discussed. She said witchcraft is associated with "*black magic*". Employees introduced this "black magic" into the workplace for all kinds of sinister reasons: "*They use witchcraft for all sorts of things like to get a promotion, for acquiring stuff, for all sorts of things. … I have an issue with people who use black magic to get your job"* Participant 31 said. In her view, people who dabbled in witchcraft and black magic were simply evil:

"*So the issue that I have is just, people using black magic to get rid of someone … what are their families going to eat? You know, how are they going to live? And even to the extent of killing them or even making them*

sick or making them crazy. I've heard of horrible stories where people will just start losing their minds, all because someone is after their position. So … using black magic to just get rid of people, I don't think it's right."

5.3.2 Dissecting the scenario presented during interviews

After sharing the scenario/vignette regarding Employee A and Employee B with the participants, it produced mixed reactions. It was interesting to note that many paused and/or laughed nervously after alluding to the witchcraft that might have occurred in the scenario I presented (see Annexure A). I sensed that somehow the topic on witchcraft was either not quite welcome, perhaps a bit unsettling for some participants but at the same time other participants seemed quite interested to discuss witchcraft**.** For those who I sensed might have expressed discomfort, I confirmed with them whether it was okay to proceed to discuss the topic. None of the participants refused to share their views.

5.3.2.1 Victim of witchcraft

The majority of the participants thought Employee A was most likely a victim of witchcraft; that someone had bewitched her. This is by virtue of the events that had afflicted Employee A. Participant 4 laughed as he gave his opinion:

"*The first thing that comes to mind is witchcraft. Employee B that was not promoted is now using muthi on Employee A to get her sick so they* [he] *can get the position. So that's the first thing that comes to mind to me."*

5.3.2.2 Witchcraft used for promotions in organisations

The participants shared that many events similar to the scenario I presented take place in companies and government institutions all the time. It was shared that for an employee to be promoted, someone has to resign or die in order for his or her position to become vacant as confirmed by Participant 18:

"*… and this happens, even in the government institutions, where for Zeenat to be promoted, Participant 18 has to retire or die or leave. So until Participant 18 has left or has retired or has died, Zeenat will never be promoted. Then you find Zeenat, being impatient, now wanting Participant*

18 to either kick the bucket [English proverb or idiom meaning to die] *so she, Zeenat, can take over that position.*"

5.3.2.3 Witchcraft as a result of envy

Several of the participants felt that Employee B was envious of Employee A. Participant 16 mentioned that even small degrees of muthi given by a sangoma can lead to an unexplained illness:

"*I think what's happening with Employee A has to do with Employee B because obviously Employee B feels she is more deserving of the role, but she did not get it. So I'm thinking that Employee B might have went* [gone] *and consulted with someone like a healer, to say 'look, I've been in this place for this long and I did not get this role, so please help me to find a way to make this person to not be as productive as they should be in this role, so that something could happen to them, and then they would eventually put me in that role*".

Participant 16 pointed out specific clues that traditional healers use to subtly cast some evil spell on innocent victims:

"*You would see, for example, the rubbery stuff on the car; you would see a bit of dirt – usually those are things that come from a traditional healer. … They would give you small things to … put where this person would be … in like their office … to make them fall ill and often the illness would not even be explained, they wouldn't know what the problem is. The person cannot even tell you where the pain is, but there's just something that's not right. People would say, 'they might have done some black magic on you, just so things don't go well for you' and I mean the next person would sort of be able to succeed at your expense.*"

5.3.2.4 No witchcraft in the scenario

A few of the participants felt that the scenario does not necessarily reflect witchcraft, but is a coincidence or perhaps the scenario just seems suspicious. Some of these participants indicated that attributing Employee A's experience to witchcraft was a bit

far-fetched and not at all believable. In Participant 17's opinion something was perhaps happening in the environment that was not related to witchcraft. After a while of silence, then a pause, a mumbling "*hmmm*", another pause and a short laugh, Participant 17 finally concluded:

> "*Saying that witchcraft affected Employee B is a bit far-fetched, but it could be that … or it might just be that Employee A found rubbery stuff outside her door–what if the roof was leaking or there's something wrong with the roof?*"

5.4 WITCHCRAFT AND THE WORKPLACE

A few participants confirmed they had actually experienced witchcraft themselves or shared experiences of people they know who are believed to have been victims of witchcraft. Their stories are shared next to provide further insight into how witchcraft is used or experienced in the workplace.

5.4.1 Witchcraft makes one invisible

Participant 30 pointed out that sometimes an employee would do something illegal in the workplace and then blame it on witchcraft. He shared an example where an employee stole a computer despite the fact that there was closed circuit television (CCTV) installed on which the employee was clearly seen stealing it. To Participant 30, it was a mystery why the employee would steal the computer if there were CCTVs all around the area. Participant 30 simply concluded that witchcraft must have been involved:

> "*I* [have] *dealt with many disciplinary hearings where … the actions that led to the disciplinary action was* [were] *stupid, unwarranted and unexplainable and so was the testimony at the … hearing. So, you know when you dismiss somebody and you actually say, "wow, I haven't met a more stupid person firing themselves" so I would attribute it … to black magic. There was a guy that knew there were cameras in the building and he had to use his own access card to open the doors to get into the place. He stole a computer and walked out with the computer. And at the hearing, he was still trying to say "that wasn't me" even though the evidence was insurmountable."*

5.4.2 Witchcraft used to threaten employees

Participant 35 asserted people can and do use witchcraft to threaten another person's job or livelihood. She cited an example of witchcraft that affected a friend of hers who was employed in a government department Participant 35 stated her friend had sound financial integrity and did not tolerate any deviation from policy:

> "*So, people started hanging dolls with their heads off at her door and a dead rat and all sorts of things. So eventually she was forced to resign because of the amount of threats and funny stuff like that happening.*"

Participant 31 was a victim of witchcraft after she had started a new job in another province. She would dream of being attacked or strangled at night, and in the morning, she would find marks on her body but there was no evidence of forced entry into her home. After her mother had consulted with a sangoma, Participant 31 resigned from the position. Participant 31 believes it was witchcraft that drove her away from her job:

> "*I was very young … and the environment was very male dominated. And then I used to stay at the staff's quarters … it was mainly for people who were from out of town. … My colleagues used to be so cold to me because I was seen as an outsider; I mean "who is this person … coming here to … to take our jobs?" They were very cold and it was very difficult to just establish relationships and … I remember three months into the role … it started off having just weird dreams of someone strangling me like to a point whereby I would wake up in a sweat.*"

Her flatmate did not stay in the flat during the week. Participant 31 was on her own when she had these nightmares: "*So a lot of the times when I would be screaming … she would … not be there.*" This experience had left her very scared. She asked some of her colleagues to pray in her flat but she was never sure if they were part of a greater scheme to get rid of her at work:

> "*So remember I had that dream, someone strangling me and then I remember this one time waking up in the morning … I look* [looked] *in the mirror. I saw bruises on my neck … and I'm thinking "how can this be, I thought it was a dream of someone strangling me, now all of a sudden I've*

got bruises" … but … around midday those bruises would disappear. … So maybe in a month it would happen once you know…"

After sharing her frightening experiences with her husband and mother, her mother said, "*My child, you need to get out of there." And then she mentioned the fact that she consulted with this traditional healer and you know from what the healer could pick up, if I don't leave I will die, because eventually this person will strangle me in my sleep and I will not be able to wake up. And then I quit … I just quit*." After she had resigned from her job and left the town, Participant 31 never had these attacks again; but this experience had left her very scared.

5.4.3 Witchcraft used for promotional reasons

According to Participant 18, "*it's well known of such kind of witchcraft, people bewitching each other for positions*." Participant 18 related an example that occurred at his brother's workplace. A person who became very sick ascribed the illness to envy from others who had used some sort of witchcraft to cause the terrible illness:

> "*So, my brother told me there was a guy who was sick at work … he was sick for long* [a long time]. *… The guy was a driver before he got promoted … to a more senior position … and somebody with the company was wanting* [wanted] *that guy's position, that person was jealous of that guy.*"

5.4.4 Witchcraft engaged in cases of jealousy and competitiveness

In the workplace, employees can be very competitive. Participants told me that people do engage in witchcraft to get ahead in the work environment. Participant 13 used the example of when a new, younger person who has just joined an organisation is appointed as a manager or supervisor of a person who has been there for many years, extreme jealousy and intense competition between these two may leading to the work environment becoming "*spiritually toxic*":

> "*In the workplace, there are witchcraft problems… you get colleagues who are competing for the same job; or colleagues who want promotion actually and then this new person comes in. A young person, and then this person becomes quickly the manager or the supervisor of that* [established] *person.*

The colleagues that were in the company for five years or even three years or even more … they will have an attitude towards that person. So they will resort to using herbs and I won't call it pure herbs. … Now you have someone while you are at home, you have someone who is calling your name whilst [while] *busy scheming with the herbs, so you start getting affected at home. Then when you get to the office, in fact when you wake up the next day, you struggle even to get up because the environment that is at work is spiritually toxic. It is impossible to work … when they are scheming and calling your name with that herb, then it has a dire effect into* [on] *your productivity at work*."

Citing the consequences of such ongoing black magic against one particular colleague, Participant 13 continued:

"*And it causes fellow colleagues and managers to dislike you, then you'll end up getting written warnings, you'll end up* [with] *everyone having an attitude towards you. And whatever the mistake that is* [mistake you make], *even if it's a slight human error at the office, a manager or even a director will have a problem* [with it and] *will give you a written warning. They wake up, and find one little slip-up so that they can fire you because it has been building up. Every time this person is scheming about you* … [because he feels] *threatened by you* [or] *either because he also wants the promotion that you want … even if you don't want the promotion, even if the person is reporting to you, he will have a problem with you. He wants you to get fired or demoted, so that he may be promoted*…."

5.4.5 Accusations of witchcraft in the workplace

Participant 1 mediated between two colleagues. One accused the other of witchcraft. Participant 1 said she did not believe in witchcraft and she would rather seek rational explanations instead of blaming witchcraft:

"*I was new at head office coming from the plant. So I think I was open, I could be swayed either side so a couple of people came to present their cases to me. And so…*" [Laughs] … "*it happened that this one lady came*

and presented her case. … .She's got this big enemy at the office who is practising witchcraft. So I just listened with an open mind and thought "I am just … trying to understand what is going on here"'. And a few days later, the other friend who was being accused of the witchcraft, presented her case to me and said, "I have an enemy here and it's that lady and she says that I'm practising witchcraft but I'm not." So you know, now I'm in the middle! So I tried to reconcile this. … I mean I go to this one and I'm like "I don't think that she thinks you've practiced witchcraft. She spoke to me, she just thinks you guys had a fight, talk it out." Now this other lady felt the need to prove to me that it's [it was] *witchcraft and she took me to her cubicle. And, these are senior people…*" [Laughs] "… *we go to the cubicle and she says, "do you see these dots?" And I go "yes." It looked like somebody had splashed water, and because of the water, there's like rings. And then she says, "she was splashing muthi at my desk so that I could lose my job.*"

So I said, "did you see her?"

She said, "no"

I said "did they catch her on camera?"

She said, "no"

I said, "did you hear anything?"

She said, "no"

I said, "so why do you think there are circles there? Why do you think it's her?"

She said, "It's obvious! It's obvious! And in my Church they told me."

5.4.6 Witchcraft and death

In the company where Participant 32's family member worked, there was a lot of corruption. The family member refused to be part of this. Participant 32's family member did not believe in witchcraft. However, she was warned that if she did not leave, bad things would befall her. Her cousin eventually became ill and passed away. Participant 32 shared the sad story:

"*And it happened to a cousin of mine, who then passed away. … And in her case, she got promoted into* [*sic*] *a financial manager position. But she wouldn't sign things which weren't supposed to be signed. So, there was quite a lot of corruption and misuse of funds. And she refused to be part of that. She subsequently started feeling sick. Someone told her that if she doesn't leave, something will happen to her. Because she didn't believe in that stuff, she ignored the warning. She got more and more sick, and started losing her mind. And then she died… Black magic is there, it's alive, it exists and people use it in the workplace*."

Participant 14 shared that her neighbours' husband was promoted, but found dead later. His death was subsequently attributed to witchcraft by someone at the company that he worked for. Participant 14 related this incident as follows:

"*One of my neighbours had an incident similar to that where the husband was promoted … then literally a month later he was found dead in a ditch… he basically got kidnapped and nobody knew where he was… and the stories could never be, "oh maybe he was hijacked by someone." It was always "someone at work did something to him so that they could get his job; that they wanted.*'"

5.4.7 Muthi found in the workplace

The participants shared instances where muthi was actually found in the workplace. Participant 25, who works in manufacturing, shared an experience at a time when the manufacturing plant he worked at was being renovated and items were found in people's lockers that could be related to witchcraft:

"*Muthi does exist. For example, this other time where we are still expanding here in XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity] *people were told to empty their lockers before the end of the month. So there were people who did not empty their lockers. When those lockers were moved and got broken into, there were funny things like voodoo dolls. In other locker* [*sic*] *there were powders. There were funny things that you know a normal person would not possess.*"

5.4.8 Using muthi to achieve a desired outcome

Muthi can also be used to influence a certain outcome. For example, Participant 20 shared that she deals with criminal cases and one of her clients had consulted with a sangoma in order to obtain assistance to clear up his case:

> "*When it comes to the workplace, it's very cut-throat and competitive, that's where most people go and consult because that is their livelihood, that is their bread. So at the workplace … in terms of when dealing with my own clients in criminal cases they would go and consult* [a witchdoctor]. *… I once even had a client, he was wearing this bangle, and we were going to court the next day and he told me, "no, you can't go to court–but my case is sorted out." And I asked him, "what do you mean the case is sorted out?" and he was like, "you just go to court as a formality but with respect to my case, it's sorted out due to consulting with my sangoma.*"

Participant 33 shared an example of witchcraft that he was aware of. A friend of his worked in an engineering company. His friend operates machinery and told Participant 33 how he protects and secures his job:

> "*There's a friend of mine who is working for an engineering company. He told me that he is using muthi because he operates a machine. So when he is off sick or he is on leave, no one will touch that machine. If you touch that machine, then you will get hurt. So this person used muthi on that instrument … that machine so that no one will be able to use it. So I think people are using muthi for negative things and it's not right.*"

The participants also shared that there are negative people in the work environment who use muthi to hinder the success of others. This was confirmed by Participant 10:

> "*There's certain things people use, which I don't know of off course, I don't know what they are exactly but I've heard, like people will use certain muthi to make you not succeed, to make you look bad and it becomes about the other person versus yourself. So I think it depends on your character and what you allow to take to work… But then there's people who are bad*

spirited, who will go and see sangomas and [be on the] *bad sides of cultural things to hurt other people in the workplace.*"

5.4.9 Belief that religion protects one from witchcraft

A lot of participants believed that religion plays a key role in granting protection from witchcraft. Some of them demonstrated a very strong Christian belief system and were absolutely sure they were protected from harm and evil by the power of God. In fact, many believed God has more protective power than a traditional healer. Participant 8, for example, truly believed her faith protects her:

"*So, yeah, it's something that is happening, witchcraft, and it happens to a lot of people and I think it's only through faith that we can fight it because should I go to my office and find such things, I already know that there's someone attacking me. But you just say, "in the name of Jesus, I rebuke these things, whoever sent it, shouldn't like succeed in what they are doing against my life*."

5.4.10 Means of witchcraft

In answer to my enquiry as to by what means witchcraft takes place or how it manifests, there were various significant replies from the participants.

5.4.10.1 Through food

Food is a means through which witchcraft can be practised. If a person wants to harm you, they will do so by placing substances in your food. This occurs mostly in environments like call centres and retail stores where it is difficult for employees to take leave. Participant 13 observed:

"*And you will find some … even try and make a lunchbox for another person … to do some cruel things in the workplace. So if you have a problem with me, they will devise plans to make two lunchboxes and then they'll put some muthi in the lunchbox meant for me, then they'll give me that lunchbox the next day with a juice. And I will get sick, take leave. Then I will get sick more often, to the extent that it affects my leave days.*"

5.4.10.2 Through placing objects in certain places

An employee can be afflicted by items being placed in the office with the aim that it would inflict harm on the victim when she or he comes into contact with the item. Participant 31 explained:

> "*People will come and put like things in their offices, things underneath their tables, underneath their chairs… under other people's tables. So that maybe when you get to the office you get sick or you don't function normally. And the whole point is so that you can get sick and you quit work or you eventually leave so that they can get your job.*"

5.4.10.3 Through invisible means

An invisible means refers to a spirit that is used to attack other people; thus, an unseen way of doing witchcraft as Participant 27 told me:

> "*There's this thing where you get an attack at night, and people think that you are having fits but it's not actually fits. These spirits will … take you while you are sleeping at night and the doctor will declare you dead but your body will still be hot. So people will tell you that you know what, this person was taken to be used as a zombie … because you become a zombie when this happens and they use your soul to kill people and harm people … it's a bad thing*."

5.4.10.4 Through the use of animals

Animals are sometimes provided by a sangoma to a person for good fortune. However, there are strict conditions attached to keeping this animal such as the sacrifice of blood in order to receive wealth. Participant 21 shared an eerie story about a polygamous person in her community who was believed to be very wealthy. He accumulated his wealth by using a specific animal and he had to sacrifice (kill) two of his wives to ensure that his good fortune was maintained:

> "*So you always hear this in your communities. There's always that one person who is always apparently using something like a bewitched animal to get wealthy. Animals such as snakes, tortoises and even cats are still*

frowned upon. In terms of pets, I think dogs are the safest to have as an African person."

5.4.11 Hiding achievements/wealth/life events to prevent being afflicted by envy or witchcraft

Many of the participants indicated that they did not share their achievements, wealth, and positive life events with others or on social media as they fear that they will become victims of jealousy and, subsequently, witchcraft. The extent of this is that the participants do not share information regarding their pregnancy until they have reached a certain stage to prevent harm to the baby; not sharing that your fiancée's family is coming to your home for lobola negotiations to prevent others from interfering and causing harm; and even hiding material possessions to prevent jealousy. Participant 25 shared a story where he was hijacked in a vehicle that belonged to his late father. He believes that a colleague that he trusted orchestrated the incident because the latter was jealous of him inheriting the vehicle. Participant 25 declared after this incident, he still trusted nobody:

> "*So my friend orchestrated everything. My old man* [father] *passed on. And he had a Ford Ranger that was parked in XXXX* [deleted for anonymity] *in the garage. My friend said 'hey bra, just use this car, it's fine, just use it, because your mother can't drive.' … Not even a month went by … I went to drop him off the first time with the Ranger and the second time I was hijacked. And he was there. … I thought this thing doesn't add up. For four years I drove him from point X … and now after driving this car, he takes me to point Y, point Z, the next thing the car is hijacked. I don't trust anyone. He orchestrated it and he was very close to me.*"

Jealousy can occur among friends and even in families. All the participants agreed that one should keep one's circle of friends very small because once others see you prosper, they become jealous. Participant 25 explained:

> "*You do not show people what you achieved, rather keep it, keep it in a very tight circle because there are people that are looking at you and seeing where you want to go. They are not happy. If you are getting busy going up the ladder, they are not happy. They might smile with you, laugh with you,*

but they are snakes. Unfortunately, that's how it goes. Even family, family is the worst because family can go to the graveyards of your family–your passed-on family–and do funny things there…. Posting success on social media or telling everyone? No, it's a big 'no no'. People are very jealous."

5.4.12 Participants' view of other races' perceptions towards witchcraft

The participants were asked about their opinions as regard other races' beliefs in and views of witchcraft. Some of the participants shared those who do not believe in witchcraft would never be impacted by it. However, they added in SA there is the perception that Indians and Africans are the only races that believe in witchcraft while white and coloured people are indifferent. Participant 5 had this to say:

"*For me … when it comes to people who are Indian, I have seen or noted that they are also to some extent believers in some cultural practices. You'd find that on their arms they wear a cotton bracelet, especially if it's women. If you are married, there is also the dot on your forehead. I have been friends with some people who are Tamil and so forth. They also believe in cleansing and rituals. So, I think for people who are spiritually conscious like them, maybe they could take it more seriously. But when it comes to coloured people and white people, I generally think they are indifferent because it's difficult to make someone believe something they've never heard of or seen in their lives*."

An interesting perspective came from Participant 34 who said witchcraft is not a purely African concept as other races also use it, but in different ways. She said for white people, witchcraft is packaged in an 'acceptable' manner whereby it seems acceptable to visit a medium like a psychic, but not a sangoma. According to Participant 34, it is important to understand that if one is a black African, it does not necessarily mean that one engages in witchcraft:

"*And witchcraft for me is not a black concept; it is* [a] *people concept. … It's just that, for white people… I'm sorry to say but I feel like they package theirs to be acceptable … They package theirs to look like it will be okay to say, 'I went and I saw a psychic'. That is acceptable for whites. But for some*

reason, when the stuff is done by black people then all of a sudden we do not understand, all of a sudden we do not understand psychics, we do not understand mediums. And all those things, those are exactly what sangomas are. But it seems more acceptable when you say 'I went to see a medium' unlike when you say "I'm going to see a sangoma.""

5.4.13 Causing harm to others

Participant 13 confirmed people who request assistance to get rid of a colleague or get a promotion do not act in a moral way; those who request protection from witchcraft are more apt to be morally inclined:

"*… requests in* [for] *bringing people down in the workplace … it's not really healing, it messes with someone else's life. But it comes to the actions of that individual, the morals of that individual. So not all healers decline, so healers they are happy as long as you put money on the table. So their actions are not really collective …* [it is] *more … individual based … a lot of people asking for a lot of help, they want a lot of help when it comes to helping them get promotions, and helping them get rid of the witchcraft they are experiencing in the workplace.*"

5.4.14 Remedies for witchcraft in the workplace

The participants shared that imphepho should be burnt at home to remedy witchcraft that may be experienced in the workplace. If something in the workplace bothers a person, it is recommended for him or her to bath with herbs at home, burn imphepho, and use candles in preparation to talking to the ancestors. Participant 13 said employees should respect the boundaries of the workplace and should not engage in any kind of healing in the workplace through burning imphepho or using herbs:

"*No, it's stuff that they do at home. You don't do that in the workplace. Because that spirituality, you've got to do things where you sleep, where you live. So in the workplace you can't do that. But if there was something troubling you in the workplace, then what you do still at home, you bath with herbs at home, you burn imphepho and talk to your ancestors at home, what we call phahla where you are using candles and imphepho. So you do that*

at home. People who are doing that at work, they are ill advised. They have overstepped their boundaries. So it's not a case of in the workplace alone."

5.5 MUTHI

When asked what their views were about the use of muthi, many participants confirmed in general a negative connotation is associated with the word muthi. Participant 22 expanded on the topic:

"*You know muthi, it's part of the African tradition or culture. A direct translation is medicine. To tell you the truth, muthi can be used for good; it can be used for bad. That's in simple terms, like a drug or any medicines. You can use it to heal; you can use it to poison someone… So when I say muthi, I'm referring to muthi that's good and I'm referring to muthi that's bad. If you think of it back when life wasn't so Westernised, the people believed in herbs and all kinds of traditional medicine. And those kind* [kinds] *of things still exist today and you can use it to … heal, to cure asthma, to cure high blood pressure, cure headache, to heal wounds. So literally, when they say you are a traditional healer, you have basically doctored or mastered to heal … each and every disease that's there. … Muthi can actually deal with problems that are more spiritual, things that you cannot literally see but that are there. So there's muthi to do all those kind of things. And then there's bad muthi. Muthi that kills; muthi that basically puts… anyone in harm's way, muthi that can cripple, muthi that can cause accidents, muthi that can destroy life. Muthi that can make someone go crazy. Muthi that can literally do horrible things, muthi that can cause miscarriages. Muthi that can do any evil thing that you can think of.*"

5.5.1 Other races' perceptions towards muthi

According to the participants' responses, the concept of muthi among other races is misunderstood as they perceive a sangoma and muthi in a very negative manner without understanding the role of the sangoma. Participant 20 shared following information:

"*The thing is with those who are not African, they connote a sangoma as a witchdoctor and muthi as some form of medicine that is poisonous or venomous of some sort, which is not correct because there is a difference between sangomas and witchdoctors as well as muthi. So, with them, it's just a blanket umbrella, that is muthi is bad and sangomas are witchdoctors which is not true.*"

5.5.2 Fear of being afflicted by muthi

Among black Africans, there is an immense fear that if things start going bad in your life, it could be attributed to muthi or someone trying to harm you through muthi. Participant 22 expanded on the fear issue:

> *"To tell you the truth, I would say a* [the] *majority of Africans that I know, have that fear of being affected by muthi. It's the sort of belief that at work, if anything goes bad, you'd probably start crying* [out loud] *"witchcraft" which probably is the case in certain instances. But, I'd say that* [the] *majority of people think like that, if something goes bad, it's muthi.*"

5.5.3 Urban black Africans' beliefs in muthi

It appears that differing perceptions towards muthi exist in the South African urban context. Participant 1 told me that at the time she was still employed, a colleague provided a sick note from a sangoma to the manager. The manager warned other staff members that the employee was going to use muthi around the office in a negative manner. The manager was also an African who had attended a Model C school–in SA, a school having the latest interactive technologies in the classroom as well as excellent sports and extra mural programmes. Considering that the manager should therefore be knowledgeable and informed that muthi is an organic medicine, Participant 1 was upset and disturbed by this ill-informed attitude:

> "*When I worked for the XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity]*, this guy had taken sick leave and his sick note was from his sangoma. And it was a Model C* [school] *manager who received his letter … I think it was one of those subconscious things that just slip out, she* [the manager] *didn't really say much but it was like 'oh, now that he's coming from a sangoma, he's*

now going to be using umuthi in the office' … the way she said it, it was in Zulu [isiZulu]. *But a* [person from a] *Model C school … who now sees umuthi as… this disturbing thing … is unfortunate because it's hundred per cent organic medicine.*"

5.5.4 Muthi and consulting sangomas for better prospects in the workplace

Majority of the participants were in agreement that people definitely use muthi to get ahead in the workplace. This could be for general protection or even to seek help if one is going for an interview. Participant 25 consulted with a sangoma to ensure his own protection in the workplace, and to protect himself from being accused of things that he did not do:

"*So for me, just so that you know I have … I need to strengthen myself in the workplace, I need to go to a sangoma and then that sangoma can just wash me and just make sure that I am feeding my soul, but I need to be strong in the workplace so that funny things don't happen. Funny things, I mean like somebody does not accuse me of things I did not do. So it's like protection if you can call it that.*"

Participant 25 added that he seeks the help of sangomas if he is, for example, going for an interview. The ancestors are called on to ensure success for him:

"*If I know I've got an interview in a month's time …. I can go consult with a sangoma and ask the sangoma, 'this job, I need it. Can my ancestors provide this job or please help me via my ancestors to get this job.' And then that's where the sangoma can just give me a potion to use to bath before the interview. Then I bath with the herbs and whatever he has prescribed, so that when I sit in the interview with the panel, already I have, I can say strength if I can call it that.*"

5.6 CONCLUSION

The ancestors, traditional healing and beliefs in witchcraft are key components of African indigenous beliefs that sculpt the identity of the Black African as belief in these components impacts their lives and influences adherence to cultural practices. In the

next chapter I will pay attention to how indigenous black Africans direct their African cultural identity and practices in the formal Western workplace.

CHAPTER 6:
THEME 3: BLACK AFRICANS NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE

I wanted to obtain first-hand data from the 35 participants on how indigenous black Africans directed their African cultural identity and practices in the formal Western workplace.

6.1. CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE WORKPLACE

It was important to understand whether black Africans express their culture in the workplace or whether they inhibit the expression of their culture in the workplace.

6.1.1 Expressing cultural beliefs in the workplace

The participants voiced they expressed their cultural identity at work in small but significant ways. Some participants, like Participant 14, asserted a Black African comes into the workplace as a holistic person. Hence, the cultural beliefs one practises at home influence one's actions in the work environment. Participant 14 shared the following:

> "*There's no way that you can be Participant 14 that kind of switches off when you walk into* [the workplace]*. … You come … as a holistic person and whether it's cultural beliefs or religion … I come with that to work and I think that influences kind of how you work as a person … if I want a promotion right, and my cultural belief is to pray, I'm going to pray for it. So you are bringing that belief into the workspace. If, for example, I believe in ancestors and I believe that if I want a promotion, I need to burn imphepho … then I bring it to the workplace.*"

Participant 19 agreed with Participant 14, but added the workplace should be an environment that embraces diversity so that when expressing one's cultural beliefs at work, it does not offend others' cultures or beliefs:

> "*So I think that the workplace should be accommodating to people's cultures … I think the workplace should be a place that encourages and embraces diversity so long as it's … not offensive… and by offensive I mean like slogans… that would incite kind of offence in other people.*"

6.1.2 Difficulty expressing culture in the workplace

Quite a few participants attributed the difficulty to express their culture in the workplace to the fact that employers do not understand Black African employees' cultural beliefs and practices. Consequently, some employees are willing to suppress their cultural beliefs and instead play the "pretending" game according to Participant 33:

> "*I think most of the time … the black people are suppressing their cultural beliefs. So they won't actually talk about that, they will talk about other things … So we will pretend. Everyone will just pretend as if we don't associate ourselves with it* [our culture] *until we are at home, that is when we start doing what we are supposed to* [do]. *But if we are here* [at work] *we pretend the whole time that we don't associate ourselves with the traditional cultures and practices and beliefs.*"

Participant 33's comment that black Africans '*pretend*' in the workplace concerned me. Denial of their cultural roots was difficult to understand–why would they feel they must conceal their "blackness" in a diverse work environment? I experienced Participant 33's response quite intriguing and followed this issue up with other participants. Participant 34 explained black Africans feel they must take on other personae in the workplace:

> "*I feel like* [culture] *does not necessarily spillover* [into the workplace]. *I feel for* [the] *majority of the black people … when you go into a corporate world, it's almost like you tell yourself … 'eish, I'm going into a corporate space. My Africanism or my blackness … has to take a backseat' because most corporates* [corporate environments] *don't recognise the ways of a black person …*"

Participant 5 further stated whereas in the past black Africans had limited choices to work opportunities which resulted in not being able to provide properly for their families, in modern times there is greater access to formal and permanent employment. Participant 5 reasoned that a person will therefore be more willing to choose taking better care of the family than to show or be open about one's cultural

beliefs in the workplace for fear of losing one's job. Following is Participant 5's statement:

> "*And I think also if we look at it from a historical perspective, black people are really a marginalised group amongst* [*sic*] *other race groups … so the opportunity to have employment, the opportunity to be a university graduate, the opportunity to be an entrepreneur and a successful one … unfortunately to some extent overweighs* [*sic*] *your cultural beliefs. So you are now more concerned with securing employment so that you are able to provide for your family … compared to practising your traditional beliefs even in the workplace.*"

6.1.3 The influence of the corporate culture on Black African identity

The corporate culture influences Black African employees' expression of their own cultures in the workplace. To the participants their personal awareness of being independent and assertive individuals was sorely tested because they experienced corporate culture as a culture within itself. Participant 18, for example, experienced the workplace as "*oppressing*" because it forces Black African employees to negate their cultural individualism:

> "*To some extent the workplace oppresses us. People …* [who] *practice certain cultures and religions and* [then do] *not because … we want to accommodate the working environment ... you want to be professional…*"

In Participant 18's opinion, black Africans see the workplace as an environment where they have to disengage themselves from their 'normal cultural self' and become 'their professional self' by adapting to the workplace culture. Using the example of dress code, Participant 18 said black Africans make a deliberate mind shift:

> "*I think when it comes to the workplace, even mentally, we are in a way set to think a certain way and dress a certain way because it's the workplace you know. Because I think if that wasn't the case, I would come to work dressed in my Setswana* [Tswana] *or Zulu or Swati* [Swazi] *wear … and it wouldn't be a problem.*"

Participant 32 felt she was "*in the middle ground*" somewhere. As a result of her name and background (she attended a Model C school) she does not ascribe to any Black African cultural identity. Her Westernised culture and upbringing in combination with her naturally independent and individualistic character made it difficult for her to negotiate the influence of corporate culture on her own identity. She explained her "middle ground" feeling by sharing white colleagues referred a client–he was born in Cameroon but grew up in Germany and France–to her:

> "*When I finished the call with them, his question to the person who had linked us was, 'are you sure that person is not white?' because of my accent. And the way I speak, the way I think*…"

Participant 32 had a personal awareness of being an independent and assertive individual who does not see diversity as a determinant of the workplace culture, but the workplace as a culture in itself. Participant 32 shared when "*I come into the workplace … I see myself as the same as everybody else...*" Unfortunately, this is not how she was perceived by her co-employees:

> "*… that has been good and bad in the sense that … it's worked when I've needed to be outspoken … but it also hasn't worked in the sense that … when you go into the workplace, the environment around you still sees you as* [a] *Bantu* [black] *education female, black Zulu … until you've earned the right to be like them* [white counterparts] *if that's the way to put it. So you have to earn the right to be like them.*"

Participant 32 then described how she found herself in the middle ground from a cultural perspective:

> "*What is presented from a cultural … perspective is because I come in one format* [black Zulu female] *and while I'm there people move me into another format* [white female] *because I sound like them, I talk like them, I think like them*…"

During my interview and analysis of her verbatim transcription, I realised Participant 32 was, unbeknownst to her, in a typical situation where workplace diversity relates to

more than just cultural differences. Although willing to let go of her cultural beliefs and roots and staying true to her individualistic self while at the workplace, she was equally disengaged and excluded as 'the other' because of her gender, language, geographic origin, and education. Her colleagues perceived her first as an African Zulu person, but when she speaks in her "*polished English*" they feel that she is not "the same" as them. She feels she is somewhere in the middle. The fundamental difference between Participant 32's and her colleagues is that *she* sees beyond gender and culture and *they* do not:

> "*I come in as the black Zulu girl, but when I speak to them, they then want to know where do I get my polished English, right? And then they think I'm not like them. You see, so you end up being piggy in the middle, because you're not like anybody.*"

6.2 AFRICAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

Customs include typical greetings, clothing, language, religion, symbols, and artifacts. The participants felt that if other races in SA were more aware of and understood the meanings black Africans attach to such customs, they would be more receptive to accept and respect it as they respect and cling to their own traditional customs and beliefs. Having knowledge of their everyday lives, their history and cultural practices are as fundamental to indigenous black Africans as it is for indigenous people in any other world country.

6.2.1 Dress code

Many of the participants indicated they chose to adhere to a Western dress code as opposed to wearing their cultural clothes in the workplace. Also, in certain professional bodies (for example, in the areas of nursing, law, and aviation) employees have to ascribe to dress code restrictions.

6.2.1.1 Differing perceptions towards cultural dress in the workplace

Although Participant 18 advocated for employees to be encouraged to wear their cultural attire to work, he also supported the restrictions placed on the *type* of cultural clothing:

> "*Like some, I think is it Zulus or Swatis* [Swazi], *ladies will leave their breasts out, so ...*" [Laughs] *… "I don't think you can say you can come to your workplace like that."* [Laughs] *"… but to some extent, I think we can encourage them to wear cultural clothes if it's acceptable.*"

Many participants encouraged employers to allow employees to wear their cultural attire when at work as opposed to following a Western dress code. Black Africans wear their traditional clothes with pride because it gives meaning to their tribal identity. South Africa is home to nine African tribal groups. Wearing their tribal attire adds to indigenous Africans' sense of belonging. Participant 1 said on the days she wore her indigenous clothes, she felt the happiest. She did not feel discriminated against wearing her cultural clothes to the workplace:

> "*Then I started making African garments and for me, those used to be my comfort clothes. When I was feeling down, then I would wear those clothes and honestly, I didn't even notice what other people were saying because … I felt safe in that space … the only things I remember honestly, were the compliments. If there were looks that were funny, I probably didn't notice them, I was just so happy to be in the clothes. You know they were colourful, I mean I really enjoyed them.*"

Participant 7 shared that although she mixes her traditional and Western appearance in the workplace−she wears beads, isiphandla and makeup−she otherwise follows a professional dress code. She feels people should not come to work in their cultural attire. She stated Zulu as well as Indian (Hindu and Muslim) employees understand it, as they too embrace a professional dress code:

> "*I wear everything. And the thing about it, Zulu people understand. Zulu people, Indian people … Hindi people, they understand very well, Muslim people, they understand so nobody really asks you about it. … We do our hair up nicely, we pin it, we do makeup, and we go attack* [to] *the boardroom like normal people.*"*…* [Laughs] "*You can wear your beads perfect enough then you can just wear normal clothes like other people.*"

6.2.1.2 Regulations on dress code in certain professions

In certain professions the dress code in the workplace is dictated. Hence, if the employees are not allowed to wear their cultural clothes, the employer cannot be accused of discrimination as shared by Participant 18:

> "*Especially speaking from the perspective of a law firm, the Law Society or the legislation has prescribed* [prescribes] *the dress code … so it can't be someone's fault or … discrimination against a culture, it's probably legislators' discrimination because it's what is expected of every lawyer– to wear a suit; it's sort of a code in the particular industry* [profession]."

Participant 19 saw some deeper meaning in prohibiting the wearing of accessories in a profession where a strict dress code has to be followed. According to her, dress code regulations subtly indicate that traditional accessories such as beads, isiphandla, and some garments in the workplace means one is not following the professional dress code:

> "*… anything that does not conform to the traditional corporate look is really looked down upon in the corporate world … and hidden in the unsaid is that what is not acceptable … your beads, isiphandlas, or any traditional dress that does not conform to corporate professional attire.*"

6.2.1.3 Normalising cultural dress in the workplace

Employees in the formal business and corporate sector are afforded the opportunity to show off their cultural attire in the workplace on Heritage Day in SA. Restricting the wearing of one's full traditional attire to one day in a year elicited various reactions from the participants. Many disagreed with this practice as they felt that one should be allowed to display one's heritage every day and not be limited to wearing it on one specific day in a year. Participant 26 pondered on whether black Africans displaying their cultural attire on Heritage Day only is a practice that should be continued:

> "*I have an issue with people that want to dress up on Heritage Day … every day we should be living our heritage. So, every day I'm Zulu, so*

why can't I dress like I'm Zulu every day? Why should I wait for that one day in a year to then dress up?"

Participant 14 argued that if cultural attire is normalised in the workplace setting, it would become normal and nobody would be making a big fuss about it. She argued that being restricted to wearing one's cultural attire only on one day in a year creates a sense of awkwardness for many Black African employees:

"*I also don't like the fact that … on Heritage Day, it's such a big thing that 'oh my goodness, you're wearing your traditional hat or you are wearing your traditional outfit.' … I don't think it* [Heritage Day] *should be scrapped in totality, but people should be allowed to wear what they want to wear, even if it's their cultural clothes without … people making a big hoo-ha about it.*"

During her interview, Participant 10 recalled an incident when a colleague would wear his cultural dress many times to work. Participant 10 said because it attracted a lot of attention, he began to feel awkward and eventually he wore it less and less. She added in her workplace Black African employees did not wear traditional clothes except on Heritage Day:

"*So there was a guy … and he was Swati* [Swazi]. *And he would have days when he would wear his traditional wear. But I think the attention he got made him wear it less and less … I don't see people wear cultural wear unless it's Heritage Day* ..."

Bringing in a different perspective to the issue of normalising cultural dress in the workplace, Participant 33 revealed that Black African people often 'fake' their culture on Heritage Day because they do not wear the actual attire worn when performing traditional practices. It was his perception that the clothes worn to the workplace on Heritage Day do not represent the real ingenious black Africans' traditional cultural dress code:

"*I think on Heritage Days* [sic] *… especially the black* [African] *community, we fake things. So the clothes we are actually wearing on*

that day, is not the clothes that we wear at home when we [are] *doing the traditional practices. So we go to the shops and we buy something that is closer to what they used to do but it is not that* [the real attire] *… where I come from, the ladies would wear the cows skin* [hides] *on their bodies; just the cow skin, but when it comes to Heritage Day, they'll go to the shops and buy the nice colourful clothing and say 'this is our heritage'. This has nothing to do with* [their traditional culture] *and it's not clothing what we actually wear in real life. So this is faking the dress code. So you will find that I am Pedi and I will come with a Xhosa traditional attire or another culture's traditional attire. Why can't I wear what our ancestors used to wear?*"

6.2.1.4 Hair, wearing beads and conforming to corporate attire

For some of the female participants, wearing their beads and cultural accessories in the workplace represented not only their cultural background, but also their personal identities. Participant 26, for example, is well-known in her workplace for the daily wearing of African Zulu bead jewellery. She described her dress code as fashionable in an Afrocentric manner because it enhances her personal identity:

"*I think they* [African Zulu bead jewellery] *are beautiful from a decorative perspective and I feel they complement my outfits. So when I am getting dressed, I also … see them as an extension of who I am as a person and then they reflect my culture. … So from that perspective, it's just pride in me being Zulu and it's just the way I like to express myself from a fashion perspective and then they just acknowledge who I am and where I come from*."

Participant 26's personalised combined dress code was not uncommon among female participants. Some, like Participant 34, would enjoy wearing her beads, but in her opinion beads do not form part of a professional dress code in general:

"*Yes, definitely* [I would wear beads]. … [but] *they are also not seen as professional so, rightfully, I can wear it if I wanted to, I can wear it anywhere else, but when I come into the office, I must remind myself*

that I need to dress accordingly… remember that [a] *prescribed uniform … is how you dress when you're going to work you see, so beads don't form part of that.*"

Some female participants shared they did feel patronised in the workplace owing to their looks. Participant 32 mentioned her dreadlocks [braided hair associated with Rastafarianism which is in turn associated with an indifferent attitude] caused her opinions "*not to be taken seriously*". However, her comment left me in some doubt as to whether she purposely intended to test colleagues' reactions because she then confessed, "*I wanted to see how would I* [*sic*] *be received … walking into boardrooms with dreadlocks*…" Her next comment that her dreadlocks "… *were always neat so I never went into boardrooms with funny dreadlocks … in the workplace, you're still expected to have a certain look* …" seemed to me as if, despite her outward 'anti-cultural corporate' behaviour, her inner self yearned to be accepted instead of being perceived as "*piggy in the middle*". On the other hand, keeping her dreadlocks neatly styled could also attest to her being a professional and dedicated employee who '*should be taken seriously*'.

6.2.1.5 Funeral dress code and the workplace

When in mourning or attending a funeral, Black African cultural beliefs dictate a specific dress code that has to be abided by. Many of the participants spoke about dress code when a person passes away and how this is worn in the workplace. Participant 24 shared the following:

"*… you will have a certain clothes. For a male, it will be a stitch on the arm, so you will have to wear that every day. So it will be sort of like a black cloth that he attaches to his clothes every day. For a female, they will have to wear a black coat for the whole year or for six months. Until, after that one year or six months or three months … she goes for a cleansing ceremony … she has mourned and now she is ready to face the world again.*"

Participant 5 said if one is in mourning, the dress code is usually accommodated in the workplace, but it depends on one's workplace environment:

"*It depends on your environment … for instance, if you are a doctor or nurse, you are required to wear uniform. You often also know in retail stores, you'd find that people are in uniform, so if the work environment you are in does permit … you* [to] *wear black, you do. In instances where you are not allowed to wear black, you'd find that a woman wears a headscarf and she wraps it around a portion of her body. Some women prefer to wear the scarf before you* [she] *would for instance, put on a blouse.*"

According to Participant 25, the Black African cultural dress code when in mourning can be adaptable. He shared if someone passes away, he wears his usual work overall and the patch goes on his clothes underneath the overall. His safety in the workplace is still secured and he still wears the required uniform required by the company that he works at:

"*I can put the patch; it's not a problem … so I can just put a patch on as a religious gesture. So at work, they don't have a problem with that. But then, I have to put it underneath, on my T-shirt. And then I wear my overall over it.*"

6.2.2 Tribal markings

Tribal markings were mentioned by some of the participants as a means to identify individuals from different indigenous ethnic groups. Participant 26 spoke about the origins of tribal markings that occur in the Zulu and Xhosa cultures. Participant 26 told me even before the time of the famous Zulu King, Shaka Zulu (1787 – 1828), the Zulus were a proud nation. They were proud of their tribes and the area each tribe came from. She continued:

"… *and so the way they would distinguish themselves to be recognisable would be through tribal markings*. *And most often, they would take a sharp object–in this day and age they normally use a razor–and they would actually make slashes … in a specific pattern or in a specific design that then demarcates that particular clan* [tribe] *… if you meet somebody that you don't know* [but] *that has the same markings as you, you can*

then acknowledge that person as a relative of yours because they come from the same clan [tribe]. *So it's more for recognition, identification and it's also a sense of pride."*

Participant 26 further explained that tribal markings differ between cultures:

"So when a child is born, when they have their naming ceremony, they will also get marked either on the face, sometimes on the arms, it depends either on the clan and the family, in what they believe in. And there are also some, I know specifically in the Xhosa clans, who will also then amputate a finger.""

Obviously, part of the South African workforce comprises employees who have tribal markings. But, because there is little understanding and recognition of each other's culture, open conversation or dialogue regarding these markings are in a way taboo. Understanding the symbolism of tribal markings is non-existent in the workplace. Participant 26 ascribed this lack of open dialogue to understand each other's tribal culture to the diversity of cultures represented in the workforce:

"*So oftentimes, when you come into the workplace and you've got these visible cultural markings, people don't often understand … I find that because of lack of diversity, there isn't an openness for* [among] *people to feel comfortable enough … to actually ask "what is the meaning of your tribal markings?""*

6.2.3 The concept of time

Participant 1 referred to the concept of time and the different meanings and understandings of time between African standards and workplace standards. Participant 1 stated a black Africans' concept of time differs from that of a westerner. In African culture, it is not disrespectful to be late. She based her argument on the fact that the inherent genetic make-up of black Africans is to be or have a *"serene, relaxed, kind of cool vibe*". Participant 1's explanation was an eye-opener for me. I realised that the same relaxed attitude Africans display at home is brought into the western workplace where it is definitely not understood neither accepted. Participant 1's

statement clearly indicated there is a huge gap in terms of understanding the concept of time from an African and a western perspective:

> *"… you've heard the concept, 'it's African time'. ... In the workplace culture* [which is largely western culture as aforementioned] *it doesn't make sense … for somebody to walk in five minutes late to a meeting … and just being torn apart is not right. For me it was like, 'but you are operating in Africa! How is it that you can't even understand somebody who is five minutes late? Have you ever asked yourself why is it that the majority of black people do not arrive at half-past-seven* [07h30] *They'll arrive at five to eight, eight, quarter past eight, half past eight, sometimes even nine. But the workplace says, 'no it's just wrong, we cannot tolerate this'. Don't you think it's time for a conversation to understand the different concepts of time between the two cultures? … I think that the western culture is not willing to have a conversation about it and maybe if we had the conversation, people will start arriving on time."*

6.2.4 Time off from work to attend to cultural practices

The participants shared that several Black African cultural practices require them to take much time off from work. Currently, leave entitlements provided to employees make reference to annual leave, family responsibility leave, and sick leave. There is no leave entitlement that addresses going to appease the ancestors or time off to attend to other Black African cultural practices deemed as important by employees. Some of the participants believed this needed to be incorporated into leave policies. If a Black African person is asked to perform a traditional ceremony and does not, it could affect his or her relationship with the ancestors negatively. This could bring turmoil into his or her personal and family lives. Therefore, leave provisions for traditional ceremonies should be reconsidered according to Participant 4:

> "*Let's say I have a ceremony at home … I will have to take annual leave but it's something that has to happen. I wouldn't call it family responsibility but it's a "must" so it's not something I can run away from, it's something I believe is going to affect my life. So I think that should*

be taken into consideration also. Two or three days should be granted to employees and incorporated into leave days in case someone has a traditional issue or they need to go phahla or go to do a traditional ceremony."

6.2.5 Time off from work to attend to funerals

The participants unanimously reported that Black African employees needed between seven to ten days to attend to funerals. They also said they felt ridiculed in their places of work if others questioned them on why they need seven days to attend a funeral. Participant 5 made a comparison between Black African funerals and white funerals to illustrate why it is important to understand differences between cultural belief systems:

"*So when you compare African beliefs and the Western world, I think that's why sometimes Africans may feel ridiculed in the workplace because people are asking you, 'why do you need seven days for a funeral?' And if I can put it in a race context, for me a common practice that I have seen, particularly amongst* [*sic*] *my white friends is that a funeral is held in the middle of the day. You go to a funeral at eleven o'clock; you come back to the office and its fine. For me, as an African, I would never have a funeral in the middle of the day and then go back to work. It's not a very common* [African culture] *practice for someone to go to a funeral and after the funeral to go back to work*."

Many of the participants shared that family responsibility leave and annual leave is used in conjunction to extend the time taken off from work for funerals. Describing an African funeral, Participant 31 highlighted the reasons why additional time is required. She also explained why extra time is needed a month after the funeral:

"*Like in our culture, the minute a funeral is announced, and especially if it's a person who is close to you, you need to be there. You need to go there and help manage guests, help make sure that things like arrangements for the funeral are done. … I recall last year when my uncle passed away on a Tuesday … it meant that … by Wednesday I*

had to leave and go there to assist the wife and to be supportive to my mother. And I only returned from there on a Sunday … if ever it was one of my parents or my sister, I would stay longer because it will mean that I need to stay on once the funeral is finished … and make sure that the paperwork is in order, all the stuff that we had borrowed from different people are returned and stuff like that. So, it's definitely not enough and that's why you see people ending up taking leave like annual leave. … Sometimes people don't really understand why you need to take additional leave. I mean you've taken compassionate leave, now you need to take annual leave on top of that. Why? And it's to do all of those things."

Participant 31 then explained why extra time is needed a month after the funeral:

"*And then again, you still have to take leave a month after because there's like a ritual that you need to do where you shave off hair or where you remove the black clothes. So, it's more leave days that would be required in preparation for that specific ceremony.*"

Some organisations and employers do indeed provide what is termed 'bereavement leave'. Participant 6 shared that at her workplace an extenuation of three more days termed under law as 'family responsibility leave' are allowed for funerals or bereavement:

"*In our* [work] *policy … the family bereavement* [leave] *it's for in the case of death of your … spouse or life partner, children, adopted children, parents, adopted parents, grandparents, grandchildren and siblings. So, we separate it to say in total it's eight days. The policy says eight days in total but three are 'family responsibility' … in case of illness and five are for 'bereavement'.*

Some of the participants shared that Black African people have come to realise that there will be limitations in terms of the number of days that they can take off from work to attend to a funeral. However, the difference in time taken off from work for funerals

between senior and junior staff members has become a bone of contention in the workplace. Participant 21 elaborated on this apparent unfairness:

> "*What I have seen is that, in the workplace … we've been very supportive to employees who've had to take time off …* [but] *in different departments … there is* [a] *difference of treatment between our more senior and junior employees.*"

The granting of time off to attend to cultural practices related to funerals indicates that an opportunity is created to pass down cultural beliefs and practices to the next generation as shared by Participant 5:

> "*Crucial also is that, if there are younger kids like myself who is relatively young, that I am taught often–when there's a funeral, when there's a wedding–that this is what you need to know. So if we are not affording the employees the full time that they require, to some extent there's no fairness in it. … You are giving me time to ascribe to my family traditions, practices, and beliefs and also to understand them but it also means that should I choose to have children, these are beliefs that I would want to pass on to my children as well.*"

6.2.5.1 Defining immediate family in the Black African culture

The Black African family dynamics extends beyond parents, grandparents and children as defined by the categories of family responsibility leave in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997). Participant 1, for example, shared that she finds it offensive that leave forms determine who your close relatives are in order for you to take 'family responsibility' leave. Her grievances about "they" who wrote the rules and regulations indicate that African employees' cultural beliefs were excluded when these regulations were written. The immediate family for black Africans includes all members in an extended family:

> "*I find it offensive that the leave forms define 'immediate family' as your mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your biological siblings. And you'll be given three days of 'family responsibly'* [leave] *a year. So I took that, because my father-in-law had passed away. And I say that*

he is my father-in-law, because he is the brother to my biological father-in-law. But my husband's father passed away more than twenty years ago. So his brother stepped in and took the fatherly role. So when he passes away, it is my father-in-law who has passed away. So I go there, I come back, I fill in the form. And the form will ask what "is the relation"? And I explain it: brother to my husband's father and then it was declined because it's not immediate family. So I must now use my ordinary leave days for that day. And I thought whoever made these rules, really didn't consult Africans. It's an insult to say somebody who has raised your husband is not your father-in-law."

Therefore, the category of family responsibility leave should be broadened to include extended family members as shared by Participant 17:

"*I'll say, maybe for white people they focus on the nuclear family and immediate family so it would be your parents, your brothers and sisters … they regard that as the immediate family. Whereas with Africans family is family,* [we] *don't differentiate between your distant aunt or your distant uncle ….*"

One of the benefits for working at an organisation where the majority employees are Black African employees is that there is greater appreciation for some African cultural practices. One significant benefit was mentioned by Participant 6 who said at the company where she worked, the funeral policy covers parents and parents-in-law. In other words, being a workplace with majority black Africans, the employers clearly understood the importance of parents in African culture, irrespective if it is parents-in-law:

"*I think the benefit of working for a black firm is that there's so much appreciation for our culture. So, for example, in our funeral claim policy …* [when] *an employee passes away, you get a certain amount … but we have it for employees, spouse, children and … two sets of parents … parents and parents-in-law."*

6.2.4.3 Treating the bereaved with respect

A further complaint of Participant 1 was that upon returning from a funeral and while still in mourning, colleagues' and employers' focus is on getting work done showing no understanding of or respect for her bereavement. According to her, this lack of compassion brings bad luck "*for everyone involved*":

> "*People won't understand this button means you are bereaved … 'Oh, you know, we've been waiting, we've been waiting! You know that project!' … This person is bereaved but there … there has never been any teaching about what the different colour clothing mean. What the different symbolisms mean, what the head doek means. … Culturally you'll show mercy. But in the workplace, if you are late, you are late and our belief is that it is bad luck for everyone involved.*"

6.2.6 Culture and career success

One of the challenges experienced by Black African female participants is the time that is spent focussed on one's family versus the time that is required to be spent in the workplace to ensure career success. For example, Participant 1 shared it is expected of her to mingle with colleagues after working hours. Culturally though, a married woman–and particularly a mother–is expected to head home and cook and take care of her home and kids after work. This provides her with a sense of pride and fulfilment. Participant 1 confided she cannot justify being at a bar, having drinks with white men and then neglecting her kids at home. This poses a great challenge to her value systems. In fact, she said declining such social invitations had impacted negatively on her career progress and she wishes that her cultural values were respected in the workplace:

> "*With the cultural clashes, as a mother, as a married … I go home, I cook, I take care of the kids, ask questions, what needs to be done etc., buy what's needed … I make the home. That's where I get my sense of pride, my sense of fulfilment. In Western culture, when you are a senior … then you start having whiskey with colleagues after work and you start speaking in … in big code and talking about the big stuff* [business-

related topics], *you know that you can't discuss amongst* [*sic*] *the commoners* [junior employees]. *Culture clash for me! I am now senior at work and now there's after work drinks, 'are you coming?' I am like 'no' ... why I would be at … a bar drinking whiskey with white men? Who is cooking? So for me, it has been a hindrance in career progress, in that now I have to choose. Am I going to do the things that fulfil my value system?* [Or] *am I going to do the things that make me feel like I fit into my definition of a good mother? Or am* [I], *knowing very well that that is going to kill my career and keep me in the same place … because if you don't go to these drinks, then they can't trust you. You know, you need to party with them. Or am I going to do that and get ahead?*"

I asked Participant 1 whether it was culturally required for Black African professional women to take care of their homes first and foremost. She said there are successful women, but when you ask them about their professional growth, they will say they regret neglecting their families. Participant 1's idea of a successful career woman is firstly to be family-oriented. Being a good mother and wife is the platform from which she then launches her career and endeavour to grow professionally. This is not how she perceived Westernised Black African women who had successful careers:

"… yes there are successful women, but you will find that when they mature into their success, one of the things that they will say their regret was neglecting their families. But now, at least they were fortunate enough to at least get to that realisation, and so now … they are kind of family-oriented. And so I am thinking to myself, 'wow, my idea of a successful black woman is a family-oriented, driven career woman'. But, when you get to the workplace, 'no, a successful black woman is a driven career woman who stays late, who works on weekends, who goes for office drinks, who tells the kids 'I'm sorry, mummy's got to work, who goes [on] *overseas assignments for three months. It's kind of a culture clash. In my culture, that's not a good mother. That's not a good woman. I am happy to meet you in between but what I find is that you have to force, I don't know, you have to fight your way into getting justice, well I haven't found it."*

For Participant 1, as an African woman, to follow this Western model to achieve success in her career is limiting and prejudiced. Getting minimal sleep and working until the late hours of the morning is not acceptable to her culturally and personally. By implication, Participant 1's work culture versus personal culture argument was intriguing as it highlighted how difficult it is specifically for Black African female employees to negotiate between culture and career success. She feels that career success in one culture (workplace) translates to the fact that a woman neglects her family in her (traditional) culture:

> "*I am not going to work until midnight for one weekend, and be like 'yes, you know we slept three hours!' No, I am not going to do that. I make the lunch boxes for my kids in the morning. But in another culture, that means that you are dedicated, you are giving your hundred-and-ten per cent* [110%]. *In my culture, that just means you've neglected your family."*

The issue of African dress code hindering Black African women's career success was also raised. Participant 26 felt that her African dress code had hindered her career progression because the general notion is that in a corporate environment it is about perception. Her wearing of African beads, e.g., was accepted by her colleagues. However, Participant 26 feels that she would rather not be promoted for something she truly believes in than for her to become a chameleon and pretend to be someone that she is not:

> "*Because for one, that's not being true to myself; I'm not living my truth and then two, it's not sustainable. At some point, that facade is going to crack, and then what?*"

6.2.7 Showing respect in the workplace

The female participants seemed to struggle most with this issue. According to them, one of the major sociocultural obstacles they encountered in the corporate workplace was the issue of showing respect. For them, the lines between showing respect in their traditional way of living and showing respect in the corporate workplace were not straightforward but blurry. To always distinguish between what was a respectful and

professional attitude towards people from their own cultures in the workplace was a grey area for many females.

6.2.7.1. Respect for elders

Bearing in mind that in all Black African cultures it is paramount to show respect to elders in all circumstances and under all conditions, the participants' worry that it was difficult for them to show similar respect to the elderly in the corporate milieu was understandable. Showing respect for elders was quite a concern for both young and older participants because in most Black African cultures the elderly has to be shown and treated with the utmost respect and reverence. At home, respect for the elderly becomes visible by not calling them by their first names.

Participant 18 explains once young people start working, they are forced to get rid of their cultural upbringing prescribing one has to respect their elders. When he started to work, this was something that he personally struggled with:

> "*Before I joined XXXX* [workplace name deleted for anonymity] *I was told to respect elderly people, I wouldn't call somebody older than me – especially if that person is a married person and is a father –call them by their first name? No, that's a taboo.*"

Participant 22 said it took him about three years to adapt to a work environment where everybody is called by their names as he was also not raised to address elders by their first name:

> "[I] *would not address like someone in their first name and that took me a long time, I think about three years from entering this profession, where I started addressing people with their first name because I wasn't raised like that you know*."

According to Participant 21, addressing an older person by her or his first name has been a longstanding issue in her organisation:

> "*It's always been an issue in the organisation and I think we've had others as well, where we've struggled a bit just to address them, well,*

it's 'no, you cannot use their first name'. Even though we are trying to be professional, we won't use their first name …"

Participant 19 shared her experience whereby she was reprimanded for referring to individuals using respectful terms in a professional environment:

"*I struggle with certain subtleties that exist in the workplace. For instance, how you refer to people older than you by first name, it's such a culture shock. Because … in my culture I am taught to respect [the] elders in my community and surroundings… But I have had a nasty incident with a black man… we had gone out to like a pub or something… and I was like,* [laughs] *I was like, and I said 'nthate…'* [nathate is respectful term to address an elderly man in Sesotho]*… And I just automatically kicked into my home, you know like, addressing him as 'nthathe' and he's like, "You call your father that, you don't call me 'nthathe,' you know, here I'm just my first name.""*

Respect for elders in the corporate workplace is more prevalent among black Africans who grew up in rural areas. Participant 26 stated:

"*And most often … regardless of their job title and their role, they* [employees from rural areas] *would actually be more, almost subservient to elders and they will never openly disagree with an elder because culturally it is frowned upon.*"

Various other comments were made by participants on how the inherited traditional acceptance among Black African populations groups that elders deserved the utmost respect is manifested in the corporate work environment. For example, Participant 27 still abided by respectful traditions in the workplace:

"*Yes, I still practise that especially with older people. … If you are in a meeting, and an older person is standing, I must stand up and allow her to sit down because she is old. The younger people greet the older people first–you have to just show respect, show ubuntu to that person. That is what is called ubuntu.*"

Conversely, older employees' reactions towards the respect young employees bestowed on them also differed from person to person. Participant 21 and several other young employees who were in positions of seniority treated their older receptionist with respect:

> "*We had a lady and she was in reception and we couldn't address her by her first name, it would just be very disrespectful … it would have been weird if someone said to her "XXXX"* [name deleted for anonymity] *which was her name so we all referred to her as "ous* [a term to address an elderly woman] *XXXX"…*"

Unfortunately, the older receptionist was rude and definitely did not appreciate her young senior managers' considerate attitude towards her which made the situation unpleasant as Participant 21 reported:

> "*I mean, I had a couple of incidents with her where I needed her to do something and because she addressed me like a child, she couldn't do it and she was the receptionist. She didn't want to do it and she said to me literally, she said, 'you are the child and you do this'. … My line manager didn't understand why we have this complex issue and I had to explain to her that this person is basically older than me and for me to come down from the second floor to come tell her what to do is almost unheard of … so it was quite a difficult position we were in and many people related* [to it]."

On the issues of traditional respect shown to older people at home versus corporate culture, Participant 19 shared the following:

> "*So I actually came in calling people 'nthathe' … I was called in* [by management] *to say that this is not the* [corporate] *culture … and you have to call people by their first name. … But I tend to call the black men who are older in the workplace still by nthathe … I call them nthathe XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity] *and I think they understand where that comes from.*"

Participant 18 voiced in the modern workplace environment young graduates are more likely to behave in a disrespectful manner to older employees because they were not raised to honour their cultural roots and they still struggle to adjust as they enter the workplace. According to Participant 18, employees "*wear multiple hats so they need to transition into different roles when at the workplace and at home*". Participant 22 agreed and said it was only after three years that he started to accept that certain cultural dos and do nots are different in the workplace than at home.

But, the most significant statement made by Participant 22 was, "*The importance of not looking anyone in the eye, those are all principles that we were taught and that we carried* [into] *the workplace.*" As confirmed by the following two participants, there was little doubt among all participants there is indeed a spillover of some century-old traditional beliefs and customs into the corporate cultural environment. According to Participant 19 employees had two choices:

> "*We definitely do carry the principles of our culture into the workplace and have to either choose to abandon them, to kind of fit in and adapt into the workplace or choose the areas where you'll have them remain. … You have to tear yourself away from your socialisations and upbringing that your culture kind of raised you in when you get to the workplace...*"

Admitting that in boardroom meetings it is permitted to address older staff members not in accordance with any cultural or traditional way because everyone is playing on the same field, Participant 26 added it is critical to find a balance between being professional and also not forgetting one's cultural heritage:

> "*There is quite a bit of it that happens, where you find … especially your younger executives … or your younger staff members or employees, coming into a company* [feeling] *threatened to go up against an elder and openly disagree with them. But they might handle it offline or they* [young employees] *might actually just step down out of fear of coming across as disrespectful. And I think that's when we need to find a way of being professional but yet not forgetting our cultural training.*"

6.2.7.2 Respect for colleagues

Considering that the Black African population comprises nine ethnical diverse groups each with its own cultural traditions, histories, and backgrounds, the participants also said it was often difficult to know when not to cross some cultural borders. Respecting the privacy and space between co-workers could end in disastrous outcomes if not addressed via understandable communication.

According to Participant 2, he uses respectful terms not only to demonstrate respect for his older but for all his colleagues in written communication:

> "*So even here … I make an example with XXXX when I write an email to him, I can't say 'Hi XXXX ... I write Hi Mr XXXX …* [Laughs]*.* "*… I must first get permission from him to call him by his first name. Even with XXXX, I know that at times, whenever I write an email, I would say Mr XXXX said this and this and this." Then he'd be like 'why are you saying Mr XXXX because I'm XXXX.' So, it's a matter of respect*."

Burning imphepho in the workplace was mentioned by Participant 14. A colleague burnt imphepho in the office and this started to affect the sinuses of another colleague who then complained. Participant 14 indicated that this example shows that some employees do take their cultural beliefs into the workplace.

> "*There was another colleague who was coming in and burning imphepho every single day. By day three, the secretary was like, 'this thing smells bad'. So yes, we understand that you doing this for whatever reason you're doing it for, but like how do you do it in a way that doesn't affect us? And so that proves that your beliefs … go with you everywhere…"*

However, Participant 14 said the good outcome in this case was that as colleagues they could discuss the situation and solve it in a mutually satisfying manner:

> "*I don't think that the lady took it in a bad way because the secretary* [said] *it's affecting her medical condition, not necessarily just, 'switch it off because we don't want it'. Maybe if she had come across … as being*

rude about it and saying no this is the workplace or whatever, it would have resulted in a different outcome. But because she was like, 'listen, because of my sinuses, this is affecting me so maybe can you do it in the morning after everyone has left the office' … that was kind of how we solved it."

In Participant 32's case, it seemed as if her struggle to not be "*piggy in the middle*" was further hampered by her Westernised behaviours in the workplace which starkly contrasted with that which is expected from a black Zulu female employee. Once again, Participant 32's Western history seemed to cause confusion in her working environment. Although she was true to herself and her Western upbringing, I understood that her conduct could cause confusion in her relationships and dealings with other Black African employees:

"*I don't necessarily think I can't call you by your first name. … I look you in the eye when I talk to you, and I don't see why you should go first before me, you know what I mean? So the difference between me and my white colleagues would be if someone didn't look me in the eye, I would not interpret that as disrespectful. And I would not judge them if they were quieter in speech, because in corporate, you're supposed to talk a lot, yet, culturally, you're supposed to keep quiet. So I would not assume their silence meant they* [are] *dumb or don't know what to say … because culturally, I get it!*"

Participant 1 shared that some employees and people in communities tend to laugh at those with tribal markings. This is represented by big scars as this is regarded as being rural or barbaric. Participant 1 said many of them try to hide their tribal markings to avoid being embarrassed by others:

"*I have a cousin who has big scars … they cover* [he covers] *it up in the workplace because it has certain connotations that you are rural, you are just not sophisticated enough, you just don't fit in, which is a recurring theme I felt in the workplace … the smaller the scars are, they become associated with being eager, more sophisticated, and coming from a more affluent family. And so, the real reason people* [men] *hide*

them is, in a way, they are hiding their roots, they are embarrassed about it."

Different work ethics in different workplaces further manipulate the issue of respect among employees. This was pointed out by Participant 35 who worked in two provinces. She asserted differences in work ethic between any two different Black African ethnic groups strengthen perceptions of being disrespectful. Such misunderstandings may unintentionally lead to a co-worker feeling affronted. However, Participant 35 was adamant that similar situations can be prevented by endorsing the different cultural practices that the various ethnic groups adhere to:

"So for example, working with a Zulu person, they wouldn't necessarily be highly offended if you give them an instruction, it wouldn't be questioned by saying, 'who are you to tell me what to do?'. Whereas in the Xhosa culture, you've got to first gain respect, you've got to show that you are in a position of authority to ask the question or give the instruction before an instruction is actually done … you have to tell them why they have to do their job."

6.2.8 Isiphandla

Isiphandla is an ancient tradition inherent in most Black African cultures. Made from the hide of a cow or other animal it is tied around the wrist or ankle of a Black African person when in training to be a sangoma or after completing a ritual or ceremony. It is not removed but is worn until it falls off on its own. Participant 26 explained:

"*If there has been an unexplained illness …* [or] *somebody is ill for a very long time or if they have had to go to initiation school to be a sangoma … when they do re-enter the workplace, they … will be wearing … those hide bracelets.*"

The participants shared that in many workplaces some Black African employees tend to hide their isiphandla while others wear it openly. In some workplaces employees use a net to cover the isiphandla for hygienic reasons.

6.2.8.1. Fear of isiphandla

A few participants shared that isiphandla is misunderstood and that is why co-workers fear it. Consequently, those wearing isiphandla hide it when in the workplace. The misconception stems from believing that sangomas engage in 'black magic' as opposed to 'white magic' which is for good. Participant 11 shared her fears regarding isiphandla in the workplace:

> "*… the moment I see someone with that isiphandla I … become very weary … of that particular person. Because then you know that those people deal a lot with the sangomas … there is a link between having that particular bracelet and being quite spiritually involved with the sangoma or the traditional healer … it just kind of leaves a bad taste in my mouth because it reminds me of that time in my life when I was younger and being forced to do certain things. And that's the only reason. I have nothing against those people who do that and all of that for cultural reasons, but I think … in the workplace I might not be the only one who has that particular mentality towards people who wear that particular bracelet.*"

6.2.8.2. Wearing isiphandla in the workplace

Some workplaces accommodate the wearing of isiphandla. Participant 25 wore his isiphandla during our interview because it has an important meaning to him–it is his way of showing his gratitude to the ancestors:

> "*I am wearing isiphandla right now as we speak Zee … every time I get a promotion, I thank the ancestors. … So it's just a way of thanking the ancestors … So in the workplace, I wear it.*"

Participant 35 agreed the wearing of isiphandla or beads should not be worn in certain places of work, for example, in hospitality [business where visitors/guests are received and entertained] and the food industry. She argued for rules to be put in place or for the provision of PPE [personal protective equipment] in such work environments:

> "*When I was in the hospitality industry …* [and] *the manufacturing … of food …* [wearing isiphandla was] *a concern … they* [employees] *had the hide skin. There had to be rules put in place for them to cover it up… So they had to get special coverings … so that it wouldn't interfere with their work … it was part of their PPE … So it is worn a lot, even though it can pose a risk to the environment or to the food or whatever. The company had to make an exception or make a plan to mitigate those risks.*"

Participant 5, for example, attributed the strange questions regarding isiphandla to people who do not understand Black African cultural beliefs:

> "*But there wasn't any discrimination of any nature. The other thing about isiphandla also is that it is very easy to move it up your wrist … I would prefer not to show it in most instances to avoid … comment*[s] *that I wouldn't necessarily appreciate. … I think maybe if you don't ascribe to a cultural belief, it kind of becomes difficult to explain things to people that they don't necessarily understand. … But you'd find people would comment things that were rather odd … 'What is this?*' [Laughs]. *'What does it mean?'* [Laughs]. '*Why are you wearing it?*'"

6.2.8.3. Challenges regarding wearing isiphandla in the workplace

The wearing of isiphandla in the workplace is a bit of a quandary. Because isiphandla is made from animal skin, ideally it should be covered for six or eight days so that it can dry up and the smell will not affect others.

Several participants confirmed that employees who wear isiphandla in the workplace cause disturbances. They shared that the decision as to whether to wear isiphandla to work or not causes a lot of personal tension and conflict for the wearer. Participant 25 shared employees who are not allowed to wear it in the workplace can remove it by cutting the isiphandla; however, they have to inform the ancestors why they are removing it:

> "*Some employers don't allow that. In that case, let's say I had the function this weekend, meaning I slaughtered this weekend, I am going*

to put the isiphandla on, on Sunday but come Monday when I need to go to work then I need to cut it out… Usually, you need to let the ancestors know, 'ok ancestors, I'm going to have to take this thing off because at work they don't allow such things, they don't accommodate such things.' But you need to burn the imphepho and let the ancestors know what's up."

Some of the participants said when in the workplace, Black African employees tend to hide isiphandla that connects them to their adherence to their cultural traditions. They would hide any cultural signature when in the workplace to avoid stigmatisation. Participant 33, who does not wear his isiphandla to work, confirmed that stigmatisation was feared:

"*… we don't want to expose it to other people … So we don't actually come out in the open with that. … They* [We] *prefer to wear them on the weekend but during the work day they* [we] *don't want to do that because we feel that our colleagues might be thinking negatively about us… So we still have that fear of being stigmatised.*"

Other participants shared they witnessed Black African people being discriminated against because of wearing isiphandla. Participant 34 shared a story she heard when white people complained about an African person wearing isiphandla. Of note is that isiphandla has cultural significance and one cannot just remove it:

"*And this guy was wearing a* [an] *isiphandla … The white people complained that this guy should not be working because that thing might be carrying germs. Like, just like that, 'it might be carrying germs.' So how do you express yourself because for him to be wearing that thing, it's got a certain significance … you are supposed to wear that thing until it falls off on its own. … Now imagine your employer saying no but you can't wear that thing at the office. So can you see how they are not compromising or trying to understand that you know what … as much as this person works here, I need to also understand his culture, his traditions and stuff like that.*"

According to Participant 32, she felt unhappy because employees have to carefully navigate between conforming to the work environment while at the same time dealing with family members who emphasise the importance of wearing isiphandla all the time. Participant 32's stance was that people view the wearing of isiphandla with disgust because they do not understand its significance as a cultural practice:

> "*… it's painful* [sad] *… that people either hide them or the one who's supposed to* [wear it] *… spends time fighting with their family over the fact that they don't want to wear this because they know the stress it will cause at work. For me, if it's something you believe in,* [it] *is not right* [to hide it] *… many people, they either hide it … with a bracelet or they wear long shirts.*"

An interesting point raised by Participant 32 was that animal rights movements also view the wearing of isiphandla as barbaric:

> "*But it definitely is an area of tension and an area of disgust from* [for] *those who don't understand it … civil rights, civil animal rights movements, people who are seeing you as being barbaric for having isiphandla.*"

Participant 4 agreed a lot of shame regarding wearing isiphandla in the workplace still exists. He felt that Black African people are partly to blame for this, as they have the need to conform to the corporate culture in order to prevent them from appearing as the odd one out. Therefore, greater dialogue is required with regard to understanding African culture in the workplace:

> "*I've met a few colleagues or people … who wore isiphandla and they complained … people saying 'no it's smelly' or they have a fear that now they need to cover it up all the time so I think that's something that should be addressed also. I feel like yes, because for hygiene purposes you can't inflict your culture on other people so cover it up for the first two or three days for the sake of smell and for the skin to dry … there's still a lot of shame, and I'm not blaming it … on the workplace but specifically on black people and them thinking … 'now I need to make*

the white person understand it's different' … or I think it's … a matter of being so inclined and used to a specific norm in the workplace that when you come with something different like beads or isiphandla you feel like you're the odd one out and you need to hide it. … And I'm fine with explaining [it] *and it being conversation* [sharing the meaning in a conversation], *but* [I] *just feel like it's something that people should know by now.*"

When white colleagues see isiphandla, they ask what it is and proceed to touch it. But in Black African culture, no one is allowed to touch one's isiphandla as it is very sacred. When Black African employees tell co-workers that it is a goat's skin from when they were born, white employees often respond that African practices are ridiculous. Subsequently, African employees start to hide isiphandla as mentioned by Participant 1:

"*You know, just touching it like that and you know for us you never … touch isiphandla, it's not a bracelet, it's sacred. And then you see somebody who is flicking it like that, 'hey, what's this?' And then you're like 'aaah it's a goat skin from when I was born.' They are like, 'what, that is just ridiculous! … now you realise that, when you show this, people think you are exposed, that your family is ridiculous. So then you hide it."*

When a sangoma completes their initiation, they have to wear isiphandla on their ankles, waist, and wrists. It is not easy for them to remove it as they have to wait for the ancestors to instruct them to remove it. Participant 22 told me when he returned to work after his calling, he tried to hide his isiphandla but it does become visible when you move your hands. He was very conscious of his isiphandla showing and it caused him much anxiety:

"*I've got around my ankles, my waist, my wrist. And I've got isiphandlas on my knees and on my wrists as well. I've got five on each hand and then two on just both knees … All the time* [wearing long sleeves] *… but obviously as you move your hands around, they become visible. No one made a comment or said anything that was offensive … And I think like*

my situation has basically become different … I wouldn't want to, like I can't remove it. I wouldn't want to find myself back to a situation where I'm stressing just because I've removed the beads and isiphandla."

An example of a traditional issue is wearing isiphandla in a workplace where it is prohibited. Although it can be removed by cutting it, this can only be done after one has completed a ritual to inform the ancestors of the reason why you are removing it as shared by Participant 25:

"*Some employers don't allow that* [wearing isiphandla] *… you need to let the ancestors know, "okay ancestors, I'm going to have to take this thing off because at work they don't allow such things". … But you need to burn the imphepho and let the ancestors know what's up* [the reason for cutting it off]."

6.2.9 Acceptance of Indian culture vs African culture

Many participants drew on the similarities of the Indian and Black African cultures in terms of each having unique dress codes, burning incense, wearing a band on the hand, and beliefs in witchcraft. However, the participants did not understand why practicing Indian cultures were normal and acceptable in the workplace, but practising Black African cultures not. It was mentioned that when Indians practise their culture or display their culture in the workplace, no one questions them or stares at them. Participant 34 sought advice on how black Africans can gain this kind of acceptance:

"*I feel like Indian people have got a strong … I'm just generalising* [using them as an example] *… but they've got a strong traditional cultural belief. Every time I speak about tradition and cultures and looking at different races and stuff like that, personally I always feel that Indian people must just tell all of us how they do it. … It's like the employer understands that you know, you've become a wife … you will have that dot, those wool … you'll have on your wrist and stuff like that and it would be okay … you just go into the corporate world like that and nobody, nobody asks you questions, nobody stares at them … it's acceptable, it's okay. Like, I am telling you now that as black people, we*

should be looking at Indian people and trying to find out how did you get it right because we'd like to do the same thing."

6.2.10 Appreciation when African practices are acknowledged

Participant 1 shared an example where she was feeling hot in the summer months and she shaved all her hair off. She then attended a client meeting and the person she met with was from Britain. This person spoke to her with compassion and she did not understand why. The meeting continued with a compassionate tone and then Participant 1 mentioned that it was so hot, she decided to shave her hair. The man said that he thought someone had passed away. Participant 1 was surprised because it was a good experience that somebody had respected it and acknowledged it and this made her feel appreciated:

"*I was, what happened, I was feeling hot, it was summer and I had big hair … and I just shaved my head* [hair] *off. … So I went to the head office for a meeting and the person I was meeting was from Britain but on secondment in South Africa. And you know, he hadn't seen me before with the* [a] *shaven head. He greeted me with such compassion. I was like 'ok' … maybe it's a new year, people are calm so we have the meeting … but you know even* [his] *talking is compassionate and then I mentioned that it was so hot I just shaved my head and he was like 'oooooh! I thought somebody died in your family.' And I thought 'wow!' … it was good to see from somebody who understood it and respected it. … So that touched me a lot to see that actually even though people may not overtly say it, but they are aware of some of our religious practices and they respect this*."

6.3 DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

It was important to know whether Black African employees experienced or witnessed discrimination in the workplace owing to the spillover of any of their traditional cultural belief systems into the workplace. Of further significance was to determine whether what the participants believed to be or described as 'discrimination' could be attributed to discrimination per se or whether it could be ascribed purely to a misunderstanding

in terms of the cultural diversity as per the employees' race, parental status, age, educational, or language differences.

6.3.1 Discrimination based on dress code

Some experiences of discrimination based on dress code were acknowledged by the participants. Participant 26, for example, shared that her colleagues felt she was too "*Afrocentric*". They often passed negative comments about the way she dresses:

> "*I never take the negative comments to heart because I always see it as people that one, are either intimidated by my patriotism to my clan or to my tribe or to my country as well because I also wear proudly South African outfits that have got the flag. ... So for me, it's an expression of my patriotism so if anyone has an issue with it, I always see it as their problem and not mine and unless they come to me and ask me a direct question, I actually don't address it.*"

The negative comments that Participant 26 received was perceived by her as discrimination, also because she felt that she had been excluded from projects due to her dress code whereby she had actually been called 'militant':

> "*I have actually been called militant because of that and when I challenged the term militant, what does militant have to do with me wearing beads and dressing Afrocentric, they weren't able to defend it.*"

6.3.2 Discrimination based on Black African cultural practices

A definite case of discrimination was an incident mentioned by Participant 35. A female Xhosa waitress had long hair on her face that was curling on her chin making it very visible. Her culture prescribes she is not allowed to remove her facial hair. Her manager was an English female and she instructed the waitress to remove her facial hair or to find another job. Fortunately, the matter was settled when the waitress sought Participant 35's assistance. Participant 35 said she mediated the case:

> "*I mediated the discussion. Yes, it did pose a risk … in terms of serving food. So we found her a back-of-house* [in-house instead of waitressing]

job at the same level. She could still wear a mask on her face that wouldn't interfere with the quality of the food neither would it interfere with her beliefs."

Participant 34 said if one has to wear isiphandla after completing an ancestral ceremony, it must be hidden or cut to ensure her or his continued employment and to prevent discrimination:

"*Then they'll have no choice but to hide it ... because now you are, for lack of a better word, here you are you are serving two gods. You are a traditional person who's just gone to do their traditional ceremony and you have to wear that thing* [isiphandla] *but also you need this job. So like, the only way for you to survive, or for it to survive, is to cut it. That's the only way. And it shouldn't be like that."*

6.3.3 Africans discriminating against Africans

Many participants agreed that many black Africans from different cultural tribes discriminated against their own race. Participant 35 confirmed discrimination existed among Black African employees when answering the calling to become a sangoma. She did explain it was not the norm in all Xhosa tribes, but she did witness in one Xhosa tribe that when a colleague answered the calling to train as a sangoma, tribe members began treating the former in a different way. Participant 35 explained:

"*So that sangoma one … that person* [who] *is in training to become a sangoma … not all the clans* [tribes] *would be welcoming … to be* [wanted to be] *in the same environment. So they wouldn't even, for example, we had a canteen, they wouldn't even sit with that individual and eat because they could see, by her beads, that she was a sangoma in training.*"

The intense discrimination between two Black African races was experienced first-hand by Participant 29. She shared her belief that black Africans discriminate against other black Africans; it is not other race groups (coloureds, whites or Asian/Indian) that discriminate against black Africans. As a Pedi, Participant 29 worked in a

predominantly Venda cultural environment where she experienced humiliation and discrimination because she was not Venda:

> "*There is discrimination but funny enough the discrimination comes from amongst* [*sic*] *ourselves as Africans. … I am a Pedi and I went to work in a Venda area. I was viewed as if I am sort of a pariah* [outcast] *because they were like, 'okay, so this Pedi lady is here to take our jobs' … I did not speak a word of Venda and I was ridiculed, I was told 'no, why are you here if you don't speak Tshivenda … You need to learn to speak the language here because you came here we are not going to accommodate you.' … They were hostile towards me … they'll be like, 'but you don't speak the language so do you want us to speak, we're not going to speak Sepedi, it's not a Sepedi area.' And I was like, 'I don't expect you to speak Sepedi, I'm expecting that we speak English. They were like, 'no, even English. We're not going to speak in English. You need to learn.'*"

Participant 3 shared that he also had to learn about ancestors and other traditional cultural practices as he too was quick to judge individuals who practised culture, and regarded these practices as witchcraft. He felt that he was being judgemental towards his Black African colleagues. He then enquired as to why rituals and ceremonies took place and tried to understand the reasoning behind them. Participant 3 feels Black African employees are disadvantaged in the workplace setting:

> "*Even I, I think I had to be, at some point in my life I had to be schooled about the ancestors and stuff because I was quick to discourage and to judge people that practise or that believe in ancestors because I did not do … traditional things it was witchcraft, these people are bewitching our lives. … I used to say I was being rational, but in my rational I was being negative and judgmental towards them. But I have since … started paying more attention to them; trying to understand even though it does not resonate with me but trying to understand where they are coming from and hearing their stories.*"

Whether actions or behaviours are seen as discrimination in the workplace depends on the type of workplace that one is employed in. For example, if you work mostly with black Africans, you can refer to others by their clan [tribe] names, even if they ascribe to Christianity. But if you work in a place where different cultures are present, it might cause others to be irritated or annoyed because they do not understand your culture. Participant 15 indicated that as an African, she had to quickly adjust herself to allow her to flourish and conform in the work environment:

> "*I wouldn't say there's a direct discrimination, I think some of the behaviours may lead to kind of you coming across as maybe not competent … not looking elders in the eye, for example* [or] *speaking anyhow to people that are senior etc. I think those kind of inherent African behaviours may lead to you being overlooked, for example, for promotion etc. because you may not come across as a person who's confident or a person who knows what they're talking about because of the way you deliver the message. … I had to quickly snap out of 'oh no this is my senior, therefore I must, you know I can't speak and whatever.' I had to kind of learn to be strong, stand firm in whatever it is you're* [I'm] *doing. Whatever it is you're saying; be assertive, look the person in the eye–I had to learn that. … We kind of sit in an environment where you have to shout across to your sales people for them to do something for you … the person I'm shouting across to I think he's like fifty-five* [55] *or something … I just felt uncomfortable with having to do that … it's just … not in my nature. But I had to quickly learn to snap out of it. … I don't think there's … an outright discrimination; I think it's just maybe overlooking you because of certain behaviours that you present.*"

6.4 CONCLUSION

From this chapter, it is exceptionally important for managers and HR practitioners to have an understanding of the beliefs of black Africans as it is evident that the cultural beliefs of black Africans manifests in the workplace and can have an impact on the well-being of black Africans. Chapter 7 is dedicated to recommendations made by participants to serve as building blocks to transform the workplace into a safe haven where the cultures and beliefs of all Black African employees are embraced and promoted.

CHAPTER 7:
THEME 4: INTERVENTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE BLACK AFRICANS IN THE WORKPLACE

In this study the established cultural belief systems of indigenous Black African employees from different cultural backgrounds were under scrutiny. In this chapter the interventions proposed by the interviewees to accommodate indigenous Black African employees and their cultural beliefs in the Western workplace are foregrounded.

7.1 CREATING AWARENESS OF AFRICAN CULTURES

A widespread problem in South African formal organisations is that black Africans, currently the growing workforce, are still exposed to predominantly Western belief systems and behavioural patterns in the workplace.

In the opinion of the participants, it was important for South Africa's people to really start understanding and accepting the reality that different sub-cultures constitute what is generally referred to as the *African culture* [own emphasis]. In an organisational, business, or office environment–which is *the workplace* [own emphasis]–a white employee, for example, still perceives Black African employees only as one singular group after more than two decades of democracy. This perception is totally skewed because, as clearly stated in The Constitution (South Africa, 1996), the Black African population comprises nine ethnic groups. In alphabetical order: Ndebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. Each group has its *own cultural background, belief system, and language*. Conversely, the white population primarily consist of two groups, the Afrikaans- and English-speaking groups also with their own cultural backgrounds and languages. The *rainbowism* of its citizens makes the workplace culture one of the most complicated for the identity negotiation of the workers and workforce in the world. This indisputable fact is rarely recognised or considered when dealing with South Africans as *one nation*.

Indeed, South Africans have been one nation since 1994; but, still divided in terms of culture, tradition, and belief systems. The division is socially acceptable to a certain extent, but in the formal workplace it simply cannot be tolerated as it leads to much unnecessary conflict and misunderstandings. The South African workplace cannot

simply be divided into black versus white (or vice versa) and neither can the workforce. It was posited by the participants that ignorance of understanding the formal workplace as a hybrid environment could be one of the reasons why culture clashes bedevil employee relationships. Participant 1 said these racial differences are not understood or acknowledged:

> "*Interculturally* [*sic*] *in an office, to a white person, there'd* [*sic*] *just be black people, but there's actually Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa etc. So, with* [in] *the office, there's white cliques, there's* [*sic*] *the Xhosa cliques … there's* [*sic*] *the Xhosas who trust each other and the Zulus who gossip together and so on. With the black culture, there's* [are] *just divisions* [different cultures among black people] *and if you understood how we perceived each other as black people, maybe you'd understand why there are clashes in the office. You'd find a way to manage that.*"

7.1.1 Interventions

Some of the participants did not believe that diversity training programmes offered in organisations were successful or that it actually achieves any purpose. The participants shared the manner in which diversity programmes and initiatives are managed was wrong. They said it is often implemented simply as a response to a negative incident that occurred and therefore only addresses 'how to respond if this or that' occurs. In Participant 26's opinion, diversity programmes should focus on the specific cultural and structural climate of a single corporation. Developing such programmes according to the 'one-size-fits-all' concept simply cannot render positive results. Corporations and organisations are made up of multiple and alternative cultures and subcultures and therefore such programmes need to be all-inclusive– meaning they should also consider subcultures in the organisation as stated by Participant 26:

> "*If the companies would start by having proper diversity programmes, it would go a long way. And the programmes would have to be designed almost specific to that particular organisation, taking into consideration, 'What is the climate?'; 'What is the culture?' … 'What is the structure of the business?' Because some of these businesses are so large … it's*

got multiple cultures. There's [are] *the regions, there's the central office, and then how do you address those micro-cultures with that one organisation and then make sure that you're designing a diversity programme that is all-inclusive …*"

A further issue raised by Participant 26 was the dualism of the workforce:

"*… because I feel as black people, we often are forced to accept and understand the white people but they don't have to understand us. So it's almost like a one-way thing where we must understand them and then we must adapt to act and speak in a way that makes them comfortable, but it's not reciprocated…*"

Participant 26 also made the valid point that wellness should be introduced into the diversity programmes because employees' physical and mental health go hand in hand with their traditional beliefs and culture.

" *… and I feel that that's the work that diversity as well as wellness programmes serve, because I think that diversity and wellness need to actually work in tandem and I think that's what needs to be corrected with organisations.*"

Furthermore, the participants questioned whether diversity training was even meaningful because it is often done as 'tick box' exercise. When diversity education is mandatory, it creates more hate and resistance. The success of diversity programmes is that it must transcend the mind and cognitive thought and "*come from the heart*" as voiced by Participant 10:

"*And my challenge with it* [diversity and inclusion] *training is that it's a tick box exercise where we get everyone into the room, we stand there the whole day or half the day… it's got to go beyond the mind and the cognitive; it's got to come in from the heart and people have got to feel the need. So for me it goes beyond the cognitive which is, 'don't say bad things'; 'don't ask stupid questions'; 'this is how it's done'. For me, that's cognitive and people are not stupid. You can do this on e-learning*

[learning done by studying at home using computers and courses provided on the internet] if you really wanted to."

Participant 10 added interventions must be done that address the 'why' so that people can understand any underlying unconscious biases that may exist:

"*I think the work to be done are* [what needs to be done is] *interventions that start to talk to the 'why'. You start to dig on* [focus on] *the purpose* [problem] *people need to understand and* [they can] *join the dots for themselves and* [and solve the problem] *to their values and to the company's values* [to the benefit of both employees and the company]. *The work for me is to be done around that space, so I am more of a fan of OD* [organisational development] *interventions where we start to unpack the 'why' for people. 'Why do you think this way?' And then you start to … work into unconscious biases. So there's* [*sic*] *the conscious biases that we know, and there's the unconscious stuff where I consistently make the same decision every day based on a bias that I'm not even aware that I have. That's why I say it needs to go beyond the cognitive*."

It is important for all races to be sensitised to the different cultural practices. This is in the spirit of ubuntu – people who understand each other and know where colleagues come from, work better together. Participant 28 shared a personal example. If he came to work with an isiphandla, and if his colleagues were aware of this cultural beliefs, then it would not be such a major problem if it smells for the first few days. He believes that sensitising colleagues is not about sensitising people to the African culture only, but to all cultures:

"*I think there must be a lot of sensitisation with the cultures of people in the workplace. Say for instance, like in my workplace, there are Indians, there are Africans and there are people from outside* [non-South Africans like Italians or Nigerians, for example]. *So, I think we need to sensitise each other with basic simple things that will make working together easy.*"

Elevating cultural awareness to an international level, Participant 28 said other nationalities and/or races also need to understand or be introduced to the concept of ubuntu. The modern South African work environment is quite open to workers/employees from countries around the world that need to have an awareness of some basic sociocultural traditions of South Africans even if the former's understanding is a bit blurry. In this regard, Participant 28 encouraged the idea of sharing some of one's sociocultural traditions and beliefs with local and foreign personnel and vice versa:

> "'*You must know that in my culture, this is not what we do; this is what we also do.' But it must be said* [It is important to know] *that we* [are] *not doing this just to promote the African culture; this is simply for us to understand each other. Because when you do this, it will become a problem because there are also other races who will say, 'Why Africans? What about Asians? What about … other races?'*"

Participant 28 envisioned a workplace where employees from diverse cultures, religions, lifestyles, and at all other levels in the organisation collaboratively engage in developing a work environment of openness and mutual respect:

> "*But this must be done in the spirit of ubuntu, making sure that everyone understands who the other person is and how is the other person conducting himself* [*sic*] *in the workplace so that when I'm in a professional working environment, it may not offend the next person when I come with isiphandla, because in the first few days it will smell. … So I work in a* [*sic*] *office, there's my colleague who is not an African, and suddenly there is a bad smell on my hand. … We need to understand each other, I think* [this is] *the main purpose of sensitising people* of [to] *African cultures…*"

If knowledge sharing takes place in the work environment, it should be done by the individual who has first-hand knowledge of the tradition or culture. For example, a sangoma should share her or his experiences via an informal talk or discussion with a department. Education should not come from the employer who has limited knowledge on the cultural beliefs of others; education has to come from people knowledgeable

about a certain cultural belief or who has experience in some or other aspect of a traditional culture as Participant 11 explained:

> "*I think those particular people … if there is a sangoma in the building or on the floor or whatever, I think a conversation maybe should be had with that particular individual or those people and ask their opinion as to would they be likely to maybe address a particular department or hold a talk about who they are … I think that's where the education should come from and not necessarily from an employer who … knows nothing about that particular life… It has to come from someone who's* [who has] *experienced it, someone who's living that life … and they should be the ones to hold those conferences and those talks in the auditorium and shed some light on who they are and their journey in becoming a sangoma and just their day-to-day lives.*"

Participant 11 suggested that listening to a sangoma sharing her or his personal journey will bring more insight to how they live and practise their healing outside of the workplace. She argued this would be a better way to educate others than sending out a flyer or a memorandum:

> "… *that would go a lot further in educating people than an employee or an employer trying to send out a flyer or a memo on the internet to speak up about sangomas or whatever it is they* [are] *trying to educate people on."*

7.1.2 The role of employers

Employers need to seriously pay attention to transform the work environment into an inclusive workplace where all employees enjoy a sense of belonging. If no sense of belonging exists, employers cannot expect loyalty and respect from employees.

People come to work holistically. According to Participant 10, it is the role of the employer to create an inclusive workplace environment in which acceptance and openness are promoted. She shared the role of the employer is to create such an inclusive workplace environment. Participant 10 emphasised she comes to work as a holistic person and wants to be perceived as such. According to her, effective and

respectful communication and showing interest in employees' lives is the key to inclusivity:

> "*For me, it's the first and probably the … simplest thing to do is to be accepting and open. … And we always talk about inclusion. And people think inclusion is purely about being black and white. … So ask me questions about something that you don't understand about me; … ask me why I wear certain things. Engage in conversation … I think if employers create that type of environment … and I'm very passionate about inclusion because it makes sure that I come to work holistically as a full person and I can contribute. And I think create an environment where people can be themselves. If it means I have to wear beads because I lost my mum for a month, then I'm going to wear those beads. For example, someone who has lost a husband would wear black the whole month. Understand that…* [and don't make] *jokes about it and* [ask] *stupid questions. Ask respectfully and respect the answer that you get. I think for me* [its] *just a* [*sic*] *basic that companies need to get right … for me the basic is creating an environment where people are included in totality.*"

The role of HR professionals in employees' everyday experience is special. Their task is to seek solutions to assist employee requests for leave, enhance working conditions by relieving work stress, and negotiate respect for diversity. Participant 6 added that it is the role of the HR department to negotiate training leave for people who answer their calling to become a sangoma:

> "*… we've had quite a few people that … to go to initiation to become a sangoma and we had to allow for it, even in terms of the leave. How do we manage this leave instead of saying automatically this person must terminate employment, we are saying* [asking], *'how do we accommodate it? What is reasonable?' Because if a sangoma has to go away for three months or six months, how do we as an employer … allow* [for] *cultural practices. So, … there's been that kind of consideration that we've had to do from a HR perspective.*"

7.2 ACCOMODATING CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

Some of the participants believed from a workplace perspective, employers need to take the lead in cultivating mutual respect for employees' differences in cultural appearances, attitude, traditions, preferences, knowledge, and sensitivity. What is critical is for the workplace to acknowledge and steer a multi-layered working environment in which there is no difference between 'us' and 'them' but only a 'we'. Employees should be given the opportunity to express themselves with what they believe in. The absence of one's culture can have a massive negative impact on the production and growth of a company or an organisation.

Some of the participants felt that they are not represented as Africans in the corporate environment. An example was provided that traditional African food is only available in a workplace canteen on Heritage Day and on no other days. This does not reflect that the organisation is celebrating diversity. Diversity extends beyond just hiring African people into a firm. By having cultural food on Heritage Day only, a message is being sent to say that it is only appropriate to celebrate cultures for one week in a year as Participant 14 explained:

> "*I do think that as a black person, in a corporate environment, I'm not represented right. And I'm going to make* [give] *an example as easy as going to the sixteenth floor and ordering food. Mogodu and my African food is* [are] *only there* [available in the canteen] *on the twenty-fourth of September. It's not there any other time of the year … So it's like we… say we celebrate our heritage, we say we celebrate cultures, but do we actually celebrate them because when I walk into* [her workplace], *I don't, it doesn't shout to me 'culture', it doesn't sound to me celebrating diversity. It doesn't. Yes, there's* [are] *black people, but that's where it ends… And diversity, I think, is more than just a box about hiring black people to say that we are a diverse firm. You know, I want to go to sixteenth floor and order ginger beer. That for me would be a transformed or a diverse firm because when we do it once every year, it's like we saying, 'it's only appropriate to do it just in the week of heritage and not any other time in the year'. And so, that doesn't represent to me a diverse working environment*."

7.2.1 Importance of policies

All employees must be informed of cultural belief policies in the organisation to prevent incidences such as outrage or critique when an employee requests leave for reasons attributed to cultural practices. It is pivotal for a company to have fixed policies in terms of any culture-related situation that would require additional leave. An example is attending the calling to become a traditional healer. If such policies are in place, HR departments and employees will have clear guidelines on how to deal with such situations.

It was important for Participant 22 that companies and organisations need to be acutely aware of and up-to-date with employees' cultural practices. If policies pertaining to cultural practices are in place, employees would be assisted and guided on how to plan for and execute such a situation. If the HR department is not fully informed and made aware about each individual employee's cultural practices and traditions, the company or organisation cannot be held accountable for denying an employee's rights or successfully assist the person. Participant 22 expanded on the policy issue as follows:

> "*I think the first thing would be more information as far as the diverse cultural beliefs* [are concerned]. *People need to be better informed; they need to know that these things actually happen … so that when it actually does happen, it's not like a shock… And the one way that I feel … could actually help in ensuring that people are better informed is if, for instance, a company were to have* [sic] *fixed policies governing the situation. Policies … in order to have a policy you need to be informed. So a policy, if it's there you can apply it. So, if it's there, people can start questioning it, they can start exploring it. For instance, … I want to go to the issue of leave … If there was a specific leave in a workplace that specifically deals with people that actually go under traditional healer training, that will actually prompt any individual who was going through that content* [*sic*] *to have a look and say listen, 'oh, company X has this you know'. So it's not something, like when it actually happens to someone, it doesn't become something that just came out of the blue; someone is just now starting to speak about going to their traditional healer* [and] *he needs*

this amount [*sic*] *of time. So whenever anything happens … nobody is in shock because we all would know that is something that is catered for in this workplace. If there's information there has to be certain policies that actually addresses this issue…*"

Policies institutionalised in the workplace need to be reasonable; employees should not feel intimidated by policies or scared to question its relevance or point out its shortcomings. Participant 7 said that to attend to her calling to become a sangoma, approval was required from the CEO [chief executive officer]:

"*So it specifically said any spiritual or calling … I remember reading it … I remember it does have a CEOs approval, but before you get to the CEO, there* [are] *all these other hoops of people that you have to jump through –assistant general manager, general manager, your executive, your COO* [chief operating officer] *before it gets to the CEO. And it's just like…*" [Laughs]. "*It's just a lot! And I'm not saying that the norm must be vastly changed, but I think policies can make it a little easier for us too. I know that there is a risk of everybody suddenly having a calling and having to go and sit somewhere, but there should be something that kind of, that is not as daunting as applying to the CEO to kind of answer a calling.*" [Laughs].

Employers should be creative in instituting policies that can also benefit Africans in the workplace. Participant 16 shared that where she was employed, female employees who go on maternity leave are entitled to a one month transition period where they receive full pay but only work half-day. In her opinion, she thought it was a positive step towards helping a new mother transition back into the workplace. She added it helps a new African mother too who needs to stay at home for three to six months. It also works well for new African mothers who have to be at home before sunset. This policy allows mothers to transition while also abiding by their cultural practices:

"*So the one thing … that we do … that I really like is the transition period. I think it is important to highlight that it could mean different things for different people, so for … we* [are] *doing it because we say it's to help the mum to be able to …. transition back quite nicely and all that but for*

an African mum, it's actually really good because ... for African mothers, you would need to stay at home for three to six months depending what the family agrees on. So if … you just had a baby and if we give you this month to sort of work half days, it really sort of works quite nicely for them, because already remember you [are] *supposed to be home before the sun sets. So if you knock off early for at least … that month, it really is helpful. Not only in terms of you being able to transition quite nicely into the workplace but also to be able to abide to your traditions as well*."

The issue of abuse or misuse of policies was also raised in conversation with the participants. Participant 22 informed me that letters from the Traditional Healers Council (THC) could also be misused but he felt there are other ways to verify whether a person is actually attending to their calling. He mentioned the example that it would be a good idea for the workplace to request photographs of the ceremonies or documentation to verify the employee's attendance. His spiritual father, his gobela, was also willing to help employers and employees by providing confirmation. One challenge identified by Participant 22 was that many traditional healers are not part of the THC:

"*Even with sick leave, like you said, you find people abusing that as well, you find people going to doctors and paying for sick notes, it happens. So even if you were to say we need a letter from the Traditional Healers Council or anyone registered with the Traditional Healers Council, something like that can be misused. There could be ways to try and verify that a person is actually going through what they say they are going through. For instance, they could provide whatever documentation or photographs of the ceremonies or something like that. I've never really thought of it the way that you'd asked me, and I'd say if you are going through a legitimate calling, I think it's possible that you could take pictures of where you are, what you* [are] *doing. Even my gobela, my spiritual father, he was willing to go through each and every step of the way. Like, for instance, if you guys were to give him a call and even if you guys were to even have managers come to his homestead, he was willing to do that … just to show that this is a legitimate*

thing. … Those are the kind of things that … basically you as an HR manager could ask and visit the place; you could ask to speak to the gobela or the person providing the training, you could also ask to get a letter from the African Traditional Healers Council or someone that is registered with the Traditional Healers Council to basically write a letter or something like that, verifying that a person is actually going under [*sic*] *a training basically. The only unfortunate thing … I realise is that not a lot of … traditional healers actually are part of the Traditional Healers Council. You would find that people are really working and helping people but are not really registered … it's something you guys as employers could use to actually check what actually is going on."*

7.2.2 Spiritual support in the workplace

The participants shared several ideas on how spiritual support for African employees can be integrated into the workplace to help them cope physically and spiritually. One recommendation was that spiritual workshops should be hosted in the workplace. Participant 13 shared if he had had a bad dream about being bewitched the night before, it would interfere with his functioning the rest of the following day. The purpose of the spiritual workshops therefore needs to focus on helping employees to offload that which is bothering them. If they manage to balance their spiritually in the workplace, they would be more productive. Alternatively, there should be someone who can provide spiritual counselling according to Participant 13:

"*There needs to be spiritual workshops in the workplace. When I was working, if I had* [had] *a bad dream of being bewitched in that dream* [it] *will mess up my whole day because I understand the consequences of that dream. It's witchcraft outside the workplace. So managers … need to allow spiritual workshops. And spiritual workshops are broad in the sense that they cover not only your African traditional healing but even your religious people.* [Such workshops] *will be tailor-made to suit the individual*[s] *who will be attending. And those spiritual workshops will help the employees to offload, will help the employees to talk to somebody, will help the employees to have a more spiritually balanced life in the workplace and that will help the company to be more productive. So if it's not … spiritual workshops,*

then there needs to be somebody who will counsel those employees once in a while."

Participant 13 agreed that similar to employers who attend employee assistance programmes to gain access to a registered counsellor; employers should include someone who can assist African employees with spiritual concerns:

"*I think … that* [it] *is essential to have a person like me to deal with that* [their spiritual onslaughts]. *Because when you talk about spirituality, it can be something that is happening at home in the family. Most people who … are at the verge of accepting the ancestral calling are fighting day and night with their families. Their families, they don't want them to accept the calling. So those people, they don't even have the energy to go away and work and be productive. So it is essential, those guys to have a special person like me who will be one call away*."

It was further recommended that it would be useful to have a traditional officer or consultant similar to an HR practitioner whose services are available to employees when they feel burdened in the workplace due to their cultural beliefs or practices. Participant 5 shared her stance on this matter:

"*So let's say … we could have a traditional office, a consultant synonymous* [*sic*] *to an HR practitioner in the sense that, when you feel disgrieved* [*sic*] *in the employment workplace, you know that you've got a HR structure that's set in place. You consult with your HR practitioner … for instance, if you want to file a complaint of discrimination, of sexual harassment etc. I think we could perhaps consider setting up a structure that is akin to that, in the sense that you would allow employees in the workplace and across all workspaces to have a traditional consultant who would then be consulted, or a cultural consultant. We can call it whatever we prefer really, whatever is deemed to be suitable to allow employees to consult*."

The introduction of cultural consultants in the workplace could result in educating and raising consciousness about cultural practices among all other employees. This would also raise awareness and allow employees to avoid instances of discrimination or

saying things that might be regarded as offensive. Participant 5 shared sometimes in the workplace one finds good collegiality, but instances also arise where a person could offend another person because of an absence of knowledge. The introduction of a cultural consultant will make the workplace more conducive for all:

> "*I think it* [having cultural consultants in the workplace] *would be nice to have it as a common practice in the employment space particularly because it could bring education and a consciousness to other employees about understanding people's cultural beliefs. Because understanding a cultural belief doesn't mean you now ascribe to it, but I think it could raise a little bit more awareness especially avoiding instances where there is discrimination or you are offending someone and you aren't necessarily conscious that your statements may constitute something that is offensive. So perhaps we could try and introduce a formal or an informal structure in the workplace that would allow employees to … gain more consciousness about your fellow colleagues. You know it's so interesting that, in the employment space, you would have such a great workspace and there could be great collegiality, but you would find that in some instances, you may offend your fellow co-worker not because you intended to."*

7.3 A PROFESSIONAL ENVIORNMENT FREE OF CULTURE

Some of the participants indicated that workplaces should be culture free.

7.3.1 No interventions are required

Several participants felt that it was not necessary to have interventions to create awareness about cultural beliefs in the workplace. The reason given is that others may not be interested in the topic and therefore it will be difficult for them to understand it. Participant 25 said if someone was curious, they should ask him and he would explain anything they wanted to know:

> "*… because you* [are] *going to find people who are not even interested. So why do you want to take that person, and taking him through a ten-minute burden of explaining what isiphandla is? It is not necessary. Those who want to know can come and ask me. That's how I feel."*

Participant 11 shared that education regarding culture begins in the home. She mentioned the possibility that there could be a developing feeling that one culture is deemed more important than any other if such interventions are introduced into the workplace. She added attention could also be drawn to a certain group of people who may dislike being noticed. Participant 11's feeling was that education regarding cultures is a very sensitive topic. If it has to be addressed, then it needs to be done in such a way that people do not feel as though they are a part of a 'project':

> "*I think it's something that you need to be raised with at home already because I feel like if you try and educate people in the workplace … it just … might look as if you* [are] *picking on that particular race or culture … And already you* [are] *drawing so much attention to that particular race* [group]. *Say now you speaking, you trying to educate employees about sangomas and everybody knows* [*sic*] *there's one or two of them in the building … I think it would be very uncomfortable for those. I don't think it's something you can educate people on. I think it's a very touchy subject because how do you do it without making people feel like they are a project or a tick box exercise*."

7.3.2 No accommodations for culture are required

Many of the participants believed that culture should be accommodated in the workplace. However, a few felt that the environment should be kept strictly professional as there are so many different cultures and it will be difficult to accommodate all cultures. Participant 2 wanted to know where the line would be drawn if someone, for example, wanted to do a ritual at the workplace. She believed it best to maintain a professional working environment and for people to perform their rituals at home. She also thought employees who were unaware of what was happening in the workplace could encounter problems:

> "*I think there's* [*sic*] *too many cultures, let's just keep it professional … Now, if we* [are] *saying we are going to accommodate all these cultures, now people will want to start doing rituals even in the office. You know, I want to protect my desk from whoever I think wants to attack me or wants to harm me. So rather keep things professional and if you want to do your traditional*

or cultural stuff, do them at home and then you're still protected that way or pray if you want to pray, and then you know that God is with you. He is protecting you wherever you go. So if we gonna [*sic*] *say we … want like our bosses to accommodate us when it comes to cultural things, it will be a problem, it will really be a problem because … I'd want to smear stuff on my desk and then when XXXX* [name deleted for anonymity] *wants to come and clean, they'll be like 'no XXXX, don't clean there' because I know why* [she] *mustn't 'clean there'*". [Laughs]. *"And then she is doing her job and now she won't understand why I'm doing it, and then she will think like, I'm being funny or I want her to get fired and stuff like that so let's rather keep it professional."*

7.4 CONCLUSION

Black Africans want to feel included in the workplace and they want their cultural beliefs to be acknowledged and respected. However, creating awareness about Black African beliefs should not be a tick-box exercise but fellow colleagues should show a genuine interest. In Chapter 8 I will discuss the findings from the 35 interviews as presented in Chapters 4 to 7.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 my focus was on determining sociocultural factors that influence and sculpture black Africans' ethnic identity and their affiliation to indigenous cultural beliefs. Chapter 5 was dedicated to indigenous black Africans' belief in the 'unseen'. In particular, their belief in the ancestors, how the practice of traditional healing influences their daily live at home and at work and their beliefs in witchcraft was explored. In Chapter 6 the impact of cultural beliefs in the formal Westernised workplace was highlighted. Chapter 7 centred on interventions to accommodate Black African employees and their cultural beliefs in the workplace.

Conforming to the grounded theory research approach (Charmaz & Smith, 2003), in this chapter I deal with integrating the study findings and the meanings the participants attached to the topic. Portraying their thoughts and feelings on the study topic gave a deeper meaning to my engagement with the participants (Charmaz & Smith, 2003). It opened my mind to understand and absorb the reality that in their real formal work life the participants experienced much silent suffering as they tried to adapt to an unfamiliar environment despite the assurance of a monthly pay cheque.

Six years into democracy, the 'old' world and the 'old' way of working started to fade as the world prepared itself for a 360° global change in the way populations lived, socialised, believed, and worked. The new technology era meant the people of the world had to adapt and change to live, survive, and work in a borderless global society. Over more than two decades later, the formal workplace in SA is still not on par to cope with and adapt to a workforce comprising "individuals from diverse cultures, religions, ideologies, and lifestyles in an environment of openness and mutual respect" (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). The increasing number of black Africans seeking or having employment in the formal business sector encountered sociocultural obstacles in the mainly Westernised formal work environments in SA.

From the discussions with the participants and an in-depth study of the available literature on African beliefs, it became evident that traditional healing fulfils a major and powerful role in the existence of thousands of black Africans. The influx of

employees with such prominent cultural beliefs into the formal Westernised workforce necessitated an investigation into how black Africans negotiate their cultural identitiy at work.

8.2 THE IDENTITY OF A BLACK AFRICAN

As a result of colonisation, indigenous Black African people have had to deal with the erosion of their own beliefs and systems related to spirituality, rituals, and general well-being (Matthews, 2017). The challenges faced by black Africans in SA have been no different. The introduction of Christianity as a means of 'saving' black Africans from their 'barbaric' traditional beliefs and cultural practices in the colonial era was carried forward during the era of apartheid in SA which ended in 1994. Several participants mentioned the influence of missionaries sorely affected black Africans' strict adherence to the latter's indigenous cultural practices.

It clearly emerged from the discussions that both Christianity and African traditional beliefs – the latter represented in the form of the African Indigenous Religion–currently still form an integral part of black Africans' daily lives. Adamo's (2011) observation of the rise in the African Indigenous Religion membership numbers–particularly in times perceived as 'difficult' or 'of emergency' or 'of crisis' by black Africans–was similarly observed by the participants. They also shared that they resort to the African Indigenous Religion when experiencing times of racio-cultural difficulties, when experiencing a financial or familial crisis, or any kind of physical and/or psychological illness.

It was noted by some participants that they sometimes need to choose between the Christian faith and the African Indigenous Religion. According to the Christian doctrine, cultural practices need to be abandoned if one believes in God. However, this choice becomes a dilemma when black Africans experience times of great stress and problems. Then the pressure from family and friends to find their 'cultural roots' again if they want the problem solved causes enormous inner turmoil to black people who see themselves as 'Christian' but also tend to be 'traditional and cultural' in their belief system.

Depending on their background and upbringing, the degree to which they adhere to Black African cultural practices differed among the participants. It was mentioned that the cultural beliefs practised by black Africans has been and always will be the means by which whole communities are brought together. Triandis (1989) is supported by Eaton and Louw (2000) by agreeing this 'coming together' or consolidation reflects the collectivist nature of African culture. Interestingly, even those participants who shared they do not practise African cultural practices confirmed they would continue to attend rituals and ceremonies to ensure that the sense of community is not lost even though they do not believe in it. In this manner, cultural rituals or ceremonies will not be forgotten, but will be remembered by those who attend it and they, in turn, will continue to carry it forward through their children and grandchildren.

The cultural identity of the Black African is mouldable. For example, if a person does not practise cultural beliefs but marries into a family that strictly follow these beliefs, adherence to the practices of her or his parents-in-law will revive the new wife's or husband's interest in cultural practices. It was also evident that for black Africans, their adherence to cultural practices was not dependent on the presence of a fatherly figure. In the absence of a father, the cultural practises of the mother are automatically adopted. This is an important point. Meyer (2018) found the number of households in SA where the father is absent is on the increase as a result of increase in divorce, non-marital childbearing and cohabitation.

Despite their adherence to practising indigenous African religion, there is an ongoing need among some black Africans to negotiate their identities to fit in with other cultures, in particular the white Westernised culture. Amoateng, Heaton and Kalule-Sabiti (2007) point out that urbanisation contributed significantly to this blending in with other cultures. In the post-apartheid era, thousands of rural black inhabitants moved closer to cities, many settled in the central business district (CBD) areas where there were better schooling, housing, and employment opportunities. Industrial areas boomed and employment opportunities were plentiful. In addition, cross-border migration between provinces as well as from neighbouring countries flourished. Hence, the indigenous cultures and traditions that black Africans have been protecting and practising for years became influenced and intermixed with those of other black races and practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a traumatic global event that required individuals to adapt to a stressful international situation (Guan, Deng, & Zhou, 2020). The pandemic led to some participants questioning the collective manner in which certain conventional practices in African cultures have been profoundly influenced. Funerals, e.g., are traditionally held over weekends. During the pandemic, funerals would take place every two days whereas before the pandemic struck, such ritual ceremonies could be stretched over a two-week period. This gave families and communities time to prepare for the ceremony and for mourners and families living far away to arrive. The drastic change "to the traditional burial rituals amongst family" at the peak of the pandemic were daunting for many traditional Black African people. The attendees were restricted to only 50 when between 100 and 200 normally attend. In addition, "a South African burial ceremony is typically an elaborate occasion where several people gather to mourn the deceased—many even coming from out of town and staying for overnight vigils." (Asala, 2020). Reviewing the manner in which Black African cultural practices are initiated, and its impact on absenteeism from work may be a practical step towards reducing employees' requests to take time off work to attend ceremonies. This is an indication of the adaptable nature of cultural beliefs.

Another participant admitted it was extremely awkward to be a young person in a senior position and give instructions to an older person whose job position was lower. This result found in Carrim's (2012) study as well, is part of socialisation in traditional cultures. Furthermore, this issue of young senior versus old junior positions may lead to some relationship problems as it totally opposes the 'respect-the-elderly' dogma guiding the traditional way of life outside of the workplace.

The aforementioned findings gave me some insight into the underlying foundations that guide and inspire indigenous black Africans to hold on to their cultural beliefs in the workplace. In the next section, I will explore specific beliefs that shape the identity of black Africans' and how those beliefs impact their identity in the workplace.

8.3 BELIEFS IN THE UNSEEN

Ancestors, the deceased family members of those black Africans who are still alive, form an integral part of their living descendants' traditional cultural rituals and ceremonies conducted at different stages of life. Age-old ancestral rituals are

performed when celebrating ceremonies like weddings, births and also at a funeral (Bogopa, 2010). The participants in this study emphasised the important roles that the ancestors play in their lives. They admitted they do keep their forefathers informed of what is happening in their daily lives when reaching certain milestones and when they experience something bad as well as good. The participants had no doubts about the fact that they firmly believed their ancestors are always with them, whether at home or in the workplace. A few participants confirmed their belief in God, but this did not deter them from also believing in the existence and powerful presence of their ancestors in their lives.

For the participants it was crucial to communicate with their ancestors and request their blessings when the former were seeking employment and, if they were already working, to bless them in the workplace. They would, e.g., not even think of attending a job interview if they had not first and foremost asked for their ancestors' blessings. Furthermore, they engaged with their ancestors when they experience difficulties or problems at work, or when they felt somebody had a grudge against them, or when they felt they deserved a promotion. They acknowledged their ancestors' blessings by thanking them, e.g., when being promoted in their work because they knew the ancestors would be greatly upset if not properly thanked for the blessing(s) they bestowed on the participants in the workplace. If not thanked, their ancestors would become upset and withdraw from them and possibly their families as well

The ancestors *always* had to be informed before one intended to stop wearing a specific cultural relic, or if one was unable to continue with a practice due to having to return to the workplace. In most cases this occurred with the wearing of isiphandla. If the participant had to remove the isiphandla due to not being able to wear it at work, the ancestors had to be informed first to prevent any retribution. The relevance of the issue to wear a specific dress code when in training to become a sangoma was highlighted by many participants. If they had no option but to return to work while in training (usually as a result of insufficient leave), they would, e.g., have to wash off the clay on their hair and face, or stop wearing beaded bracelets or an animal hide bracelet (isiphandla) which can be regarded as "*smelly*" at first. Some said they hid the bracelets by wearing shirts or blouses with long sleeves.

It was quite surprising to hear an ancestral lineage not only existed in the ancestral realm but also impacted on the workplace. For example, a young participant was in a junior position at work and fired by the director of the company simply because "*my* [junior employee] *ancestors are bigger than his ancestors, so he felt overwhelmed by my spirit. My spirit intimidated him.*" Clearly, the ancestors and their constant presence have a strong influence on the lives of black African's even in the workplace.

In literature, sangomas and their role with regard to traditional healing have extensively been studied over the last two decades. Cook (2009) conducted a study on whether, in the South African healthcare domain, sangomas would be an asset or not while Podolecka's (2016) investigation centred on the topic, *Sangomas, shamans and New Age: The hybridity of some modern healing and esoteric practices and beliefs in South Africa.* Nattrass (2005) found that in Khayelitsha, a township area close to the City of Cape Town in the Western Cape province in SA, most people who consulted sangomas were of the older generations. They were less educated and came from poorer households. In the current study, participants who were sangomas themselves and those who consulted with sangomas were educated and all were professionally employed. Hence, engaging with traditional healers cannot be limited to the uneducated or people from poorer population groups.

Most of the participants in the study consulted with sangomas for healing illnesses than making use of Western medicines. According to the participants, black Africans perceived the role of a sangoma as twofold: firstly to heal and, secondly, to inform and advise one when something was wrong in your life. The knowledge a sangoma has to warn one that something is not right in the way one lives one's life is attributed to the fact that the sangoma has communicated with the ancestors. The. Information is passed from the ancestors to the sangoma. The views of the participants in this study were consistent with those obtained by Ndlovu (2016) in KZN in that they are viewed as traditional healers, their advice is sought for healing purposes, and that sangomas communicate with the ancestors. In the current study, it was further shared by the participants that sangomas are also consulted if one requires muthi to obtain a job or to get protection from individuals which one feels might harm a person, or to cleanse oneself if things were going wrong at work.

The role sangomas fulfil in the workplace environment is seen as very important. According to some of the participants' answers, sangomas assist employees with ancestral or witchcraft issues which might impact on the the employee's performance in the workplace. Conversely, a sangoma's role is much and often stigmatised by non-black Africans who view sangomas and the role they play with much disdain. Jonker (2008) notes that negative sentiments are displayed towards traditional healers and their practices. Of note is that Jonker (2008) posits although they may contribute positively towards the South African health care system, they will seemingly always be marginalised.

However, the participants strongly voiced that the current negative view of sangomas is misleading and incorrect as sangomas are involved in healing and it is well-known that they do only "good". The scepticism with which visiting and requesting assistance from a sangoma is viewed foregrounds the key topic of this study, namely the linking of sangomas, witchcraft, and muthi. Some of the participants voiced that there is indeed a big difference between going to a sangoma for good purposes and witchcraft. But, the element of possibly becoming entangled in witchcraft made them somewhat weary of sangomas. Undoubtedly, a belief in witchcraft exists as does the further belief that witchcraft can affect a person's life at home and work negatively with very bad and often tragic consequences.

8.4 WITCHCRAFT AND MUTHI

African traditional medicine (muthi) is among the oldest and most diverse forms of medicinal systems. It is regarded as holistic because it includes cultural practices and religious beliefs that involve both the body and the mind (Mothibe & Sibanda, 2019). The participants viewed muthi as a part of their African tradition and culture and saw it as a means to healing–very much like a type of medicine that assists in curing an illness. The single most negative attribute to the fear of using or taking muthi, is witchcraft. This fear stems from the perception that, if one's life starts to become difficult or seems to fall apart, one has become a victim of witchcraft through muthi.

Tshoose (2018) refers to a case in the workplace where an employee was dismissed because of using muthi to intimidate the HR practitioner. The participants agreed that witchcraft can result in terrible tragedies such as death, or cause an illness or

misfortune as found in the study of Ashforth (2005). The narrative feedback received from the participants on the vignette I shared with them indicated that the majority's impression was that the employee was afflicted by witchcraft because of the negative effects that were described.

I was amazed to hear from many participants how real the fear of witchcraft or being affected by witchcraft was for Black African employees. What I found even more astonishing, was that witchcraft is apparently believed to be widely used in government institutions or in workplaces where participants said it was problematic and almost impossible to obtain a promotion. According to the Black African participants, jealousy and envy are the main reasons why a person engages in witchcraft. This was apparently much used in instances where a successful employee may all of a sudden encounter failures. Also, when an employee makes use of witchcraft to "*get ahead*" of a colleague or senior employer whose position the instigator of such witchcraft wants to be in.

Of significance is that some of the participants, who shared they have a very strong belief in God, refuted any possibility of witchcraft taking place in the workplace setting or in general. At the same time, several participants did actually share their own experiences of witchcraft or an experience that a friend or colleague had had. I believed this was a perception that witchcraft might be used in the workplace.

The mechanisms used by black Africans to protect themselves against witchcraft include hiding one's success, not sharing food, and seeking protection from one's ancestors. Sangomas interviewed in the study indicated that they do not engage in witchcraft and refused any requests to harm other people. In fact, some admitted that they did sometimes assist co-workers to provide them with good luck for an interview or to offer protection from harm as well as from jealousy shown by other workers in the workplace. It can therefore be interpreted that the priority role of a sangoma is to provide support to black Africans to help them prosper in the workplace; their role or function is definitely not to cause any harm to other employees neither employers.

8.5 THE CALLING TO BECOME A SANGOMA

The genesis that generated worldwide interest in research studies evolving around the calling to become a sangoma, was the employment law case in SA of Ms Mmoledi v. Kievets Kroon Country Estate (Pty) Ltd in May 2007. After seeing visions of her ancestors that required her to become a sangoma, Ms Mmoledi, an employee at the luxury estate, approached her manager to request time off to attend a traditional healer course. (Sibindi, 2014; Ratiba, 2015). (Refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.8 IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE). It was found in literature that the resulting studies covered various topics on many aspects related to sangomas and traditional healing among indigenous Black African peoples. However, the journey to becoming a sangoma concomitant with the challenges experienced in the workplace has not yet been explored before. To my knowledge, this is the first study that tackled the phenomenon of managing sociocultural diversity challenges to accommodate multicultural inclusivity in the South Africa formal corporate workplace.

I was surprised by the number of sangomas who were more than willing to participate in my study. It was obvious that the existence of sangomas in the formal South African corporate workplace is a reality, although not widely publicised. It is absolutely essential for employers to understand that time off from work for an employee to answer an ancestral calling to become a sangoma is not a favour, but a prerogative. Individuals who experience the calling to become a sangoma experience severe physiological and psychological symptoms and illnesses that cannot be cured by Western medicine. If employed, these individuals are often terrified to share their plight with their employers out of fear that the employer may not believe them; that they are lying to get extra time off work; or are simply storytelling. Consequently, the employee will keep quiet and suffer much trauma by answering the calling and trying to fulfil their employment duties at the same time.

Participants who experienced a calling to become a sangoma and whose medical reports showed no signs of any known or strange illnesses shared that they suffered difficulties while trying to deal with their psychological and physiological sufferings alone. In addition, they had no reference to current workplace examples to share with their employers on what they were going through.

In the workplace environment, it is critical for employers to be informed and made to understand the challenges faced by an initiate. While the initiate may be struggling to identify and attend to the calling, their work performance may progressively become sub-standard and poor. Employers often perceive this as poor work performance because they are not aware of and do not understand the underlying reason for the low quality of the work. Obviously then, awareness in the workplace regarding the calling to become a sangoma needs to be brought to the attention of employers to empower them with knowledge and understanding. This will help them to regulate their reaction when dealing with an employee in a situation like this.

The data from the participants showed those who attended to the calling required between three to six months' time off work. Since this was impossible, employers together with the HR practitioners negotiated with employees to use a combination of their sick leave and annual leave followed by unpaid leave. Some employers continued to pay the employee's benefits during this period while others adopted a policy to allow employees to take the time off at full pay. According to the participants, some employers were very accommodating in that they allowed initiates to temporarily or permanently relocate to another province thus making it possible for the latter to attend to the calling. Considering that in the formal corporate work environment no rules or regulations were in place on how to deal with an employee's leave in terms of answering the calling at the time of study, I was extraordinarily impressed by the willingness of employers who were really doing their utmost to allow employees to attend fulfil the wishes of the ancestors.

During the initiation stage of becoming a sangoma, initiates are required to wear certain beads, to wear isiphandla and a cloth made of a specific fabric called amabhayi. The initiates who participated told me they made sure they were presentable in the workplace. They distinctly emphasised they specifically paid attention to maintaining their professional image in their places of work.

Unfortunately, some initiates shared they experienced discrimination in the workplace. Some were not allowed to attend to the calling–one resigned, another was strictly reprimanded and instructed by the employer to remove the isiphandla before returning

to work. Colleagues and white employees in particular wanted to touch the isiphandla and beads, but this is taboo in black Africans' culture.

8.6 IDENTITY

Booysen (2018) observes that social identity groups can be regarded as groups which contribute to an individual's self-concept and belonging to such groups also has emotional and psychological significance for the members of that group. As a result, an individual may belong to several affilations, e.g., a national culture, social class, professional occupation, or a gender role (Booysen, 2018). The author adds that in SA there are many identities as a result of the diverse society. The main identity groups include race, gender, ethnicity, and language. In this context, the implications of displaying an ethnic idenity were of significance as employees from different ethinic or culture identities that differed significantly to that of the organisation were reportedly subjected to stereotyping. They were forced to either assimilate in the organisational culture or be excluded (Hraba & Grant, 1970).

The participants indicated that in some organisations they came into the workplace as holistic beings–meaning their beliefs from the home environment were carried over into the work environment. This was evidenced in the study by different examples such as wearing beads to the workplace and wearing isiphandla or reaching out to the ancestors when seeking help without being ridiculed by others. However, some of the participants affirmed they prefer not to express their cultural beliefs in the workplace because co-workers misunderstand these beliefs. Additionally, it was stated during the interviews that black Africans are so engrossed in securing employment that, if they find employment, they are prepared to willingly hide their cultural identity in the workplace. While there are calls for greater diversity in the workplace, some of the particpants expressed that the corporate culture requests employees to maintain a professional identity and to suppress their cultural identity. This was cited in the example of a sangoma who was not allowed to wear all her beads in the working environment.

Manifiesting an African idenity in the workplace has many challenges and not manifesting an African identity also has many challenges. It was evident from the interviews that for black Africans–and similarly for their white counterparts–who do not

adhere to cultural practices, it takes time to be recognised in the workplace. If the English language spoken by black Africans is "*polished*" (spoken eloquently with the correct accent and grammatical structuring), it remains a problem for other black Africans who may not speak it so well. Subsequently, those regarded as 'good English speakers' were often referred to as "coconuts". In essence, this is a derogatory term that implies being black on the outside and white on the inside (Wilmot, 2014). This finding is an important aspect for success in the workplace because the inability to communicate effectively may affect an employee's prospects of growing and flourishing at work.

Thomas and Bendixen (2000) propose that when diverse cultures work together in a country as uniquely polarised as SA, new problems may arise. According to Thomas and Ely (1996), employees' decision-making and choices at work are drawn from their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is really critical to understand the different values that people from different ethnic backgrounds bring to the work environment. The stance of Thomas and Bendixen (2000) is that managers should make a concerted effort to understand the different ethnic groups in SA in order to enhance productivity and facilitate competitiveness.

8.7 AFRICAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

In the results section of Chapter 6, reference was made to various African cultural practices. These practices will be discussed to gain a better understanding of the actual cultural beliefs that black Africans bring to the workplace.

8.7.1 Dress code

In many South African workplaces, a professional dress code is maintained. Employees wear their cultural dress mostly on Heritage Day–24 September. This day has been declared as a public holiday in SA. It is a day to celebrate the diverse heritage of the rainbow nation. Some of the participants protested against the tradition of allowing employees to display their culture only on one day every year. There appeared to be much resistance from most participants' side to participate in cultural celebrations related to Heritage Day at the workplace. Consequently, in an attempt to normalise cultural dress codes in the workplace, they tried to encourage employers to

allow them to wear their cultural attire to work so long as it meets the requirements of being professional, conforms to the dresscode of the workplace, and is not revealing.

On the other hand, the results indicated the wearing of beads and dreadlocks are still unresolved issues that require urgent attention in the formal workplace setting. The issue of discrimination against employees who wear dreadlocks is not a new phenomenon (Bernard, 2014; Frank, 2017). Evidently, black hair textures and hairstyles are to some extent connected to being 'unprofessional' and indicative of one's opinion not to be taken seriously in the South African professional corporate environment. On a personal note, I was quite surprised when this emerged as an issue during the analysis of the results. It reminded me of an incident when a very sick Black African friend had to shave off her hair. She was devastated until her mother said, "My daughter, your value, your worth is not measured by the length of your hair."

Wearing only black clothes during a period of mourning did not pose a problem in the working environment, unless a uniform had to be worn as in the case of professions such as nursing or the police force. Furthermore, the dress code could be adapted in a way for female Black African employees by, e.g., wearing a black headscarf.

8.7.2 Time off from work to attend to cultural practices

The participants agreed receiving additional days off from work to attend to cultural practices or ceremonies should be something that is considered by employers. The challenge for the employer was the South African Labour Law in the form of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997) which currently defines the types of leave and the number of days that an employee can use. The purpose of annual leave is to provide an employee with time off from work to rest and recuperate (HR Works, 2022)**.** However, employees are using this leave type to attend to their cultural practices. If the cultural practices are not attended to, this could have a negative consequence on the employee's life and of that of the family and possibly the community. This finding also brought to the fore the responsibilities that black Africans have towards participating in cultural activities amidst the pressure that organisations place on them as employees to deliver work on time. The participanta agreed they felt they were unable to take sufficient time off to attend to these practices.

Some employers took the initiative to provide more than the statutory minimum of 3 days of family responsibility leave or bereavement leave to attend to a funeral when there was a death in the family.This is a positive gesture on the part of employers as it demonstrates their understanding that Black African employees require time off to practise religious ceremonies in their own traditional way. However, at the time of study it was limited to a few organisations.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 provides a clear definition in terms of when an employee can take family responsibility leave: at the death of certain family members such as a spouse or life partner, parent or adoptive parent, grandparent, child or adoptive child, grandchild or sibling (South Africa, 1997). Black Africans place great emphasis on the importance of an extended family as well as on the role of other fatherly figures (usually an uncle) who, in the absence of a father, took care of them while growing up (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020; Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). From the narratives of the participants, it was obvious that some of them did not come from a background comprising a traditional nuclear family (where the children live with the parents) and therefore they had closer relationships with their extended family members. From the participants' responses the concept of the 'extended family' structure existing in the Black African culture is not accounted for in South African laws and organisational rules and regulations.

Additional differences between mourning for the deceased in Black African versus other cultures and traditions in SA were discussed. Black Africans require more time to make preparations for the funeral, attend to mourning family and community members who come to pay their respects, accommodate family members who often travel long distances, and provide food for all the mourners. A participant was amazed that in white societies a co-worker would attend a funeral in the morning and be back at work a few hours later. In the Black African culture, two weeks after the funeral, the family need to return to the family home of the deceased person for a final cermonial ritual. Therefore, Black African employees are in need of additional time off work to fulfil and continue with their age-old cultural practises.

Female mourners are allowed to wear a black dress or black headscarf and males a black patch on their clothes to indicate they are in mourning. What irked the participants most was that co-workers and organisations failed to be sympathetic or

demonstrate empathy towards a Black African employee in mourning. Once again, the enormous existing gap between the Western and African way of honouring and showing respect for one's cultural heritage and beliefs were self-evident.

8.7.3 Tribal markings

From the participants' narratives, it showed a lack of open dialogue in the workplace existed regarding cultural practices. The discussions on tribal markings rendered evidence that black Africans try to hide tribal markings on their faces and bodies because it was regarded as "*barbaric*" or uncivilised by other racio-ethnic groups in the formal corporate environment. Open dialogue about tribal markings and other sociocultural differences and challenges are not discussed in the workplace. Black African employees have no other option but to negotiate their identity for them to be successfully assimilated into the Western workplace culture. Ramabulana and Mafunis' (2014) stance is that in many South African corporations and formal workplaces, indigenous black Africans remain the cultural 'other' despite the fact that they make up the bulk of the workforce. The authors posit that if a solution is not found to address and accommodate the sociocultural challenges that this 'other' is experiencing in the private and public work environment, "work will remain mechanistic and the excluded "other" will not have optimum levels of belonging. A sense of belonging to the organisation builds the required loyalty that is necessary to overcome the barriers" between the "them" and the "us" (Ramabulana & Mafunis, 2014, p. 1037).

8.7.4 Respect for elders

We understand from the current literature that respect for elders is very important in the Black African culture as this is one of the principles of ubuntu (Darley & Blankson, 2008; Mbele, 2004; Ross, 2010; Uwaezuoke, 2010). Young black Africans demonstrate their inherent respect for their elders also in the workplace. For example, younger participants shared in the workplace they did not address elders by their first names, but used a title of respect. The participants shared they found the transition to address older employees (no matter the latter's race or culture) extremely difficult and confusing. For one participant, it took three years to get accustomed to this kind of 'familiarity' with older employees and it still made him uncomfotable. Clearly, this incident is indicative of the spillover of even young black Africans' cultural beliefs into

the workplace. Conversely, older personnel from a black sociocultural background perceived young black Africans who were in senior positions as insolent and exhibited a disrespectful attitude towards them as one of the participants recalled an older Black African woman saying, "*… you are the child and you do this".* There needs to be a balance between a non-racial, non-cultural top-down power structure where neither age, race, culture or gender plays a role but seniority is accepted and respected. If this balance is not found, it may lead to negative outcomes for the organisation if the issues are not raised and solutions are not found.

8.7.5 Isiphandla

The participants shared in some work environments, the wearing of isiphandla is accepted as long as it is covered for hygienic purposes. On the other hand, when prohibited from wearing it to work the participants said they hid isiphandla to prevent colleagues from seeing it since it is feared by some employees. This fear is attributed to the fear of isiphandla and its connection to communication with a sangoma and, more importantly, their perceived involvement with witchcraft. Greater in-depth dialogue is needed with the workplace setting to educate fellow workers and colleagues on why isiphandla is worn and to share information on how sacred it is to black Africans. Employers must be convinced that isiphandla cannot just be removed at the whim of the employer and that its removal first and formost requires communication with the ancestors. Furthermore, with employeess hiding their isiphandla it creates a stressful environment for them as they try to be professional employees who keep to the workplace rules and regulations. Conforming to the dress code but at the same time trying to abide to their cultural beliefs makes their life at work unbearable and they do not feel as though they fit in. What also needs to be addressed is the smell given off by the isiphandla in the initial period of wearing it because it is a piece of string cut off from the sacrificed animal that dries up over a period of days. Although some participants regarded complaints about wearing it as discriminatory, the fairness of such statement can be challenged creating an akward situation in the workplace. Multicultural inclusivity in the workplace means for employees' well-being and happiness in the workplace must be taken into consideration. This issue has to be debated intensively to find a solution for all involved.

8.7.6 Culture and career success

It was noted by one of the female participants that for a Black African woman to advance her career in the corporate world, her family will be automatically become her second priority. This contradicts a Black African woman's role that her family is most important in her life. In the corporate environment socialising with colleagues in the evening and travelling to other places where one stays over for business purposes are not in line with the cultural beliefs of Black African communities and society. The traditonal role of an African woman is to make a home for her husband and children. The dual role of having a professional job and being a dedicated mother and wife caused inner conflict in female employees. Also, to grow and progress as a professional, it was expected from senior employees to mingle after hours where discussions focussed on work-related matters. This is a definite and clear example of how Black African females have to navigate and steer their lives; how they have to bring balance between being an exceptional employee to ensure professional growth as well as excel at motherhood.

8.8 ACCEPTANCE OF CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

The participants observed that devotees of the Indian culture and pratices are widely accepted in the workplace. In comparison, employees' devotion to Black African cultures and belief systems are not similarly accepted or acknowledged. This apparent dualism in an organisation puzzled the participants. Radhakrishnan (2005) explains historically, in the apartheid era Indians served as a kind of 'buffer' between the white minority and the black majority in SA. Indians were subordinate to white South Africans and Indians were afforded more privileges than Africans and Coloureds due to their status as a buffer group. Some of these privileges included better housing, health care as well as having access to middle-management and clerical jobs. It can therefore be assumed that this 'privileged legacy' has simply been carried over into the democratic era. On the other hand, because Indians were afforded work opportunities in western worplaces before 1994, it can be postulated that whites (Afrikaans and English people) and Indians (both Muslim and Hindu people) had had more time to become accustomed with each others' lifestyles and cultural activities which is not the case with regard to the nine Black African races and their different cultural traditions and belief systems.

8.9 DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Several studies confirm the existence of discrimination against black Africans in the workplace; discrimination based purely on their race and how it is related to career progression and advancement (Booysen, 2007a; Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2017; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Conversely, the issue of discrimination aimed exclusively at black Africans' cultural practices and their display theoreof in the workplace has, to my knowledge, not been attended to in research studies. Black African employees in this study seem disengaged and despondent. Participants did not display their cultural beliefs because they feared stigmatisation. If they did wear isiphandla, it was hidden to prevent discrimination and stigmatisation. Of note is that one of the female participants acknowledged that she felt her dress code has limited her career progress because it was perceived as too "Afrocentric". Being excluded from projects and not being provided with solid or valid reasons as to why she was not allowed to dress in an Afrocentric manner, confirm the participant experienced discrimination. In addition, adhering to cultural beliefs such as not looking elders in the eye or not raising one's voice or challenging an older employee may cause a Black African to be perceived as an incompetent employee even if one's behaviour is culturally acceptable.

The particpants emphasised that discriminative behaviour was not only exhibited by other races, but also from Black African employees The participants found this traumatic and confusing. They mentioned discriminatory joking and making derogatory comments were aimed specifically at their engagement in cultural practices and belief in the ancestors. Discrimination in an organisation or company workplace tends to end in an employee isolating him- or herself from others. For example, not sitting down to eat with others at the same table.

8.10 ENSURING THAT BLACK AFRICANS ARE INTEGRATED IN THE WORKPLACE

According to the opinion of Ng and Burke (2005), for a diverse workforce in a multicultural organisation to reap true benefits, individual differences need to be acknowledged, understood, and managed with empathy. Such benefits include enhanced employee performance and workplace productivity. If diversity is not well managed in an organisation, it could result in negative consequences such as

discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, language, or communication gaps and misunderstandings (Joubert, 2017). The fact is, if diversity in the workplace is managed in a fair manner where differences in culture, race and gender are set aside and all employees have a sense of belonging, interpersonal conflicts may eventually disappear or at least lessened. “A sense of belonging has long been recognised as one of the most powerful forces that bind people together, whether in families, clans, organisations or nations.” (Mafunisa, 2013, p. 753).

Many of the participants did not believe the diversity interventions that have been deployed in their organisations served any purpose or benefitted the employees or the organisation. Some participants argued that interventions are mainly responses to negative incidents that may have occurred. They referred to it as a ‘tick box exercises’ – something like an incident occurs; an emeregency meeting is held; management makes the ‘best possible’ decisison to address this single and specific incident; the single and specific incident is negotiated via bargaining, and that is the end of the (current) problem. Therefore, diversity interventions are not bought into by black Africans.

As a starting point, the participants shared that it is important to acknowledge that *a uniquely inherited African cultural belief system comprising many sub-cultures exist in SA* [own emphasis]. A non-African’s perception that ‘African culture’ refers to one group system signals that the tunnel leading to the light at its end, is long and treacherous. Participants explained that black Africans make an effort to understand the white culture; however, their effort is not respected or reciprocated. It was their stance that, if all people in the workplace are sensitised towards the *heterogeneity of the African culture and belief systems* [own emphasis], it would not create a sense of awkwardness if colleagues saw an African person wearing isiphandla. Colleagues would immediately respect the sacred meaning it has for her or him, simply ignore it, and continue with their work while the person wearing the isiphandla would not experience akwardness or a sene of being alienated.

The participants also voiced that diversity awareness would hold more weight if employees and employers engaged in open conversations about their cultures and beliefs instead of sending out memorandums and flyers. In the opinion of some

participants, the worst thing an employer could do was to randomly choose or invite somebody to explain a cultural belief or traditional practice that he or she has no experience of or does not even understand.

Most participants further called for policies to be implemented that provided details on the calling to become a sangoma. They felt it was demeaning to themselves and their ancestors when they are sent to and fro in the corporate hierarchy to seek approval for time off to attend to the calling. The suggestion to have a spritual guide or spiritual support available to employees implied that participating employers were attuned to their Black African employees' spiritual needs. The support of a cultural consultant to deal with any challenges they may experience was a common need expressed by the participants.

On the other hand, a few participants shared they felt the workplace should remain a professional environment where all personnel ascribed to the company's or organisation's code of conduct. It was not necessary to engage in any interventions to create cultural awareness. These participants reasoned that many cultures exist in SA and it would not be fair to other African sub-cultures and other cultures in general, if only one or two black sub-cultures were to be accommodated in a formal organisation. Acceptance and understanding of their Black African culture in the workplace is welcomed by black Africans employees. The participants indicated that it makes them feel valued and respected when their cultural beliefs and practices are respected.

8.11 CONCLUSION

The participants in this study provided information regarding their Black African identity at home and their identity in the formal corporate work environment. Negotiating their Black African identity at home and possible ways to assimilate it with that of the existing formal corporate culture in SA was foregrounded.

Black African employees are careful and often afraid to display their beliefs in the workplace; they tread carefully because they value their jobs. The participants exhibited that they were in touch with their traditional cultural beliefs in terms of communicating with the ancestors, engaging with sangomas, and using muthi as means of medicine for healing. However, the fear or threat of witchcraft remains and

they are mindful of their success and how they conduct themselves in the workplace to prevent themselves from falling victim to witchcraft. In terms of the workplace accomodating employees who receive the calling to become a sangoma, a gap still remains because there are no standardised guidelines or workplace protocols to guide organisations on best practices to deal with such cases. Awareness is also lacking in terms of the symptoms that an initiate might experience before accepting the calling. This can and does lead to distressing and tense relationships between Black African employees and management.

It is clear that a lot more education is required regarding Black African cultural practices and beliefs. What is of major importance, is to create more awareness of indigenous Black African employees' traditional beliefs and practices in the workplace. The argument here is that if co-workers and corporate management are more conscious of how Black African employees grapple with articulating and negotiating their traditional beliefs to 'fit in', the more open non-black employees and management may become to assist Black African employees to 'fit in'. In the view of Ramabulana and Mafunisa (2014, p. 1038), "Managing diversity requires the creation of an open, supportive and responsive organisation in which differences are valued, encouraged and managed."

CHAPTER 9:
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim with this study was to understand the subjective and socially constructive meanings that participants associated with the study topic, namely the exploration of the indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace. I wanted to explore indigenous black Africans' historical lineage that guides their uniquely ancient traditional belief system and the specific cultural practices that form part of this belief system.

As an HR practitioner, it is my job and responsibility to guide and assist all employees to reach their full potential as humans as part of a team in today's extremely diversified and multicultural workplace. Employees do not only bring new knowledge and experience to the workplace, but also their history, backgrounds, cultural values, and belief systems. Most clashes and disagreements I encountered in the Western formal corporate work environment seemed to be linked to Black African employees' training as sangomas, their traditional healing practices, time off from work to attend to cultural practises and fear of witchcraft. If I could determine the roles that training to become a sangoma, traditional healing, time off from work to attend to cultural practises and beliefs in witchcraft played in black Africans' lives, it would allow me as well as other HR practitioners to proactively deal with these particular indigenous cultural beliefs of employees and the influence it has in the formal corporate workplace setting.

Using an interpretivist qualitative approach, I collected rich data from 35 participants during individual semi-structured interviews. A grounded theory approach helped me to obtain their insights to answer the six research questions.

Research question 1: To what extent do indigenous cultural beliefs that are practiced at home and in community environments spill over into the workplace?

Research question 2: What are the perceptions of Black African employees regarding indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace?

Research question 3: What indigenous cultural beliefs do Black African employees manifest in the workplace?

Research question 4: To what extent do Black African employees engage in identity work related to their indigenous cultural beliefs?

Research question 5: To what extent are Black African employees discriminated and/or stigmatised due to their indigenous cultural beliefs?

Research question 6: To what extent are Black African employees willing to share their indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace setting?

9.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

In my literature search I found very little information and scarce studies pertinent to how Black African employees negotiate and articulate their age-old inherited cultural identity in the formal Westernised corporate working environment. Beliefs, values, routines, behavioural norms, traditions, and how to make sense of the world around them–this ancient cultural heritage directs the lives of indigenous black Africans. I accessed many research studies in literature pertaining to one or more of these aspects shared among indigenous Africans. To my knowledge, this study is one of the first that attempted to understand how black Africans struggle to assimilate the racio-cultural beliefs and cultural practices of their society in an established Western-oriented formal workplace without creating tension between the self and society. This study shed light on the role of religion and cultures in the societal at-home-life of black Africans and its spillover to their professional work lives in a formal working environment.

The impact of Christian missionaries on the religiosity of indigenous Black African tribes–in particular on their religious traditions and practices–was explained. The most crucial aspect of their daily existence is the critical role that their omnipotent ancestors have played in the lifestyle of Black African tribal societies over centuries. In modern times the ancestors continue to guide, protect, assist, and help black Africans particularly in times of need, difficulties, and problems experienced at home, in communities. and in their working lives as confirmed by the participants.

By far the majority of the participants had no doubt that having a good relationship with their ancestors will assure they prosper in their careers as will their descendants. Of course, this unwavering belief–perhaps naïve to an outsider–in the strength and power

of their ancestors is not a gift to black Africans. On the contrary, for every perceived blessing, favour, or good will granted by the ancestors, they demand something in return. The ancestors expect to be thanked and honoured. In fact, they expect to be informed of everything that their living descendants plan to do or not to do. If this is not done, the ancestors will not only "*leave*" them as one participant said, but their wrath will bring much unhappiness and disharmony upon individuals, their families, and/or the community as confirmed by many participants.

I perused and read various books and research articles relating to topics on black Africans and their belief in and communication with the ancestors. However, none provided substantial in-depth information on how this bond between black Africans and the ancestors helps employees or employers to assimilate or mirror Black African employees' beliefs and cultural practices in the workplace. Listening to the participants opening their hearts to me, I began to realise how utterly unaware management and colleagues in the workplace are of the stress and inner struggle that culturally traditional black Africans suffer by trying to fit into a strange and culturally different environment. To me it was quite clear that employers in the multicultural inclusive 21st century workplace have to encourage, manage, and value employee differences and to make allowance in the organisation to address the whole workforces' diverse needs.

Sangomas are traditional healers who communicate with the ancestors through rituals, ceremonies, and offerings. I paid much attention to the calling to become a sangoma and their training. This was an important issue to cover because sangomas *come from* tribal communities; they *understand how to explain* strange occurrences like undiagnosed illnesses, strange dreams, and the reasons for bad luck befalling peoples. They use herbal mixtures and ointments known as muthi to treat most illnesses and, as most participants agreed, most sangomas are "*good*", meaning they do not engage in witchcraft. I also explored the calling to become a sangoma and its implications in the workplace setting. Much literature on the calling to become a sangoma exists, but there is a scarcity of information on how employers can deal with the matter in a formal workplace setting.

Considering the intersectionality theory, this study informs our awareness of how black Africans negotiate their identities in the formal South African workplace. A greater understanding was gained of the mindset a Black African has towards celebrations

such as Heritage Day in SA and how such national celebrations can initiate an adverse reaction from black Africans. Their cultural heritage is, in a word used by a participant, “sacred” to them and the idea of celebrating it only on one single day in a year is unacceptable. Additionally, the actual cultural practices that Black African employees reflect in the South African workplace to negotiate their identities were made known. For example, initiates do wear isiphandla but hide it under long sleeves or cover the clay in their hair with a doek. Apart from hiding for example, isiphandla, for fear of being asked to remove it, employees attempt to prevent stigma or discrimination in the workplace.

The elements of witchcraft and muthi were explored from a new dimension. Employees themselves explained their perceptions of witchcraft and how it is used in the workplace. It was interesting to note that many said they would do anything they can to prevent themselves from becoming a victim of witchcraft–even hiding successes that have been achieved. In fact, achieving success is usually a proud moment for an employee and she or he wants to celebrate. The participants also expanded on the use of muthi for cleansing purposes before informing the ancestors that a cultural practice cannot be continued because of workplace rules. The study brought into the open understanding about aspects of witchcraft and muthi not known before. This study served as a vehicle through which unknown information could be foregrounded to provide more insight on how employees *can* function at work and the factors that have an impact on *how* they perform in their work.

Ultimately, the study provided valuable information on the thoughts of black Africans and what employers can do to better understand African culture and practices in South African businesses, companies, and organisations.

9.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is extremely important for employers to show respect and empathy towards their employees’ cultural and religious practices in the South African workplace. When ruling in the case of Kievits Kroon Country Estate (Pty) Ltd v. Mmoledi and Others, Judge Tlatletsi, Judge of the Labour Appeal Court, said that employers and employees must work together to develop systems in workplaces to address challenges related

to cultural diversity. He was very firm on the matter that employers should not trivialise the beliefs of others.

Furthermore, it is important for managers and co-workers to be aware of the cultural beliefs and practises of their colleagues to promote harmony, respect, understanding and also collegiality in the workplace. It will further create a culture of tolerance for the beliefs of others by promoting better understanding and eliminating bias.

The body of knowledge that has been created, will play an important role in contributing to the diversity agenda of the South African workplace. It will be important for HR practitioners and industrial psychologists to take cognizance of the challenges experienced by black Africans so that policies and workplace practises can be reviewed to create an environment where black Africans can enter the workplace holistically, and not hide parts of their identity. Furthermore, the findings regarding the importance of traditional healing in the lives of black Africans will allow for black Africans to utilise and benefit from indigenous traditional healing systems without judgement from their employers. With greater awareness regarding the process to become a sangomas, HR practitioners will be more equipped to deal with such scenarios in a dignified and swift manner, without prejudicing the employee. With an increased number of black Africans, seeking to go back to their roots and engage in African traditional religious practices, awareness of these beliefs will pave the way for tolerance and accommodation in the workplace.

9.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All research studies have limitations and it is important to report on them (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019).

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.6.1 Sampling) my study was based on the availability of participants and the interest to participate. I used a purposive snowball sampling technique to select study participants. It allowed me to select individuals who I believed would provide meaningful answers even though no direct face-to-face involvement occurred during the qualitative data collection process.

From those who showed interest in participating, I stressed that participation would be via a video interview (Zoom or Teams). I selected participants who qualified for

participation as per the inclusion criteria. The potential participants were requested to sign and date the informed consent form if they were willing to participate in the study and return the signed consent form to me within two weeks. I did not receive a signed informed consent form from one female who was based in Mpumalanga. I did not investigate the reason because I believe it was her right to decline participation. I received signed informed consent forms from only three provinces, namely KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and Gauteng. Only one participant was from the Eastern Cape and the other 34 were distributed over KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

It was disappointing that only one represented the Eastern Cape while none from the other six provinces participated. The assumptions I made were all connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps some did not have access to computers at home or were not computer literate and therefore did not know how to access Zoom or Teams. At the height of the pandemic people were stressed, traumatised by tragedies and deaths in families, and in general quite confused and living in fear.

It was impossible for me to observe subtle differences in participants' whole body language. I had to rely on the upper body (eye movements, posture changes, frowning or smiles, shaking the head, etc.) for possible signs of irritation and agreement or disagreement. Obviously, it would have been ideal to have been in a normal face-to-face interview situation to interpret whole body language, but I did manage to see some participants were wearing isiphandla on their wrists.

Also, the participants represented mostly the Xhosa, Tswana, Zulu, and Swazi Black African cultures. It would have been more inclusive if data from more minority African cultures could have been obtained. Only two minority groups were represented by the participants, the Mpondo and Pedi.

9.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study centred on the experiences of black Africans employed in the corporate environment. Recommendations are made for possible future avenues to be explored.

The South African corporate environment is a typical formal Western workplace that is often affiliated with international corporations and companies. As employees, black

Africans fulfil the roles of white-collar workers in a professional environment. Future research should focus on the experiences of blue-collar and pink-collar workers.

A longitudinal study is recommended to follow young black Africans who grew up in rural areas and then enter the professional working environment to understand how they assimilate in the working environment – how they project their cultural beliefs at the beginning of their employment and as they progress through the years to determine if they become more comfortable in and with the working environment?

Future research should also focus on the minority ethnic groups that were not represented in this study. The findings from such population groups may not be transferable. Therefore, it will be important to understand the human experiences of these minority groups.

It was noted that senior staff experience greater flexibility than junior staff in attending to funerals and taking time off from the workplace. Junior staff are expected to provide proof of their absence, e.g., providing a death certificate. The hierarchical concept of senior vs junior position privilege in the workplace should be further investigated within the South African context.

The participants' work experience in a corporate environment where they were engaged in professional employment was explored. Research on the experiences of blue-collar workers in a similar context may lead to interesting findings if the experiences between white-collar and blue-collar workers in the same setting are compared.

An exploration of the work ethics between the different Black African cultures may have significance considering the findings of the current study that the work ethics of Xhosa people and Zulu people differ.

The career advancement of Black African women and the impact on their traditional values would be an interesting topic for future research studies.

Future research should assess the levels of progress and cultural integration in firms or workplaces owned by African people versus multinationals.

Finally, family responsibility leave should include parents-in-law and other extended family members such as uncles and aunties. The inclusion of this policy will indicate that black Africans are holistically acknowledged in the workplace.

9.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I was satisfied that the research design provided the relevant information needed to understand the indigenous cultural beliefs that black Africans bring to the workplace and the factors that contribute to the presentation of those beliefs in the workplace. This study shed light on specific Black African cultural elements such as the role of sangomas, the role of witchcraft, and the role of muthi in the workplace. This is an area of research that must be further explored considering the fact that black Africans, who constitute the majority of the population in SA, invariably also make up the bulk of the workforce.

CHAPTER 10:
REFLECTIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

I do not think I was born to go through life skipping and stepping on stones to cross rivers. Scrambling and scaling boulders and rocks before assaulting all obstacles in my life full-on, metaphorically, I think I was born a mountaineer. I ascended my mountains one after the other, sweeping away leaves, bushes, and tree branches till reaching the foot of the one whose snowcapped tip towered high above the clouds…. And I realised, by completing this research undertaking, I could finally plant my flag on the summit of my own Mount Everest…

In this final chapter of the research paper, I am delighted to share my experiences about the one thing that I have dreamed of all my life – writing my PhD thesis.

10.2 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is an integral part of qualitative research studies and has been practised for over a century (Dodgson, 2019). It is the means to vouch rigour and quality in qualitative research. Teh and Lek (2018) interpret reflexivity as the “gold standard” determining trustworthiness in qualitative research. The rationale is that an unambiguous account of the intersecting relationship between the researcher and the participants through clear descriptions such as race, status, age, and cultural background will improve the credibility of the findings and also allow for a better understanding of the study. Being reflexive in qualitative research further involves being transparent about decisions made throughout the research process that may impact on some areas of the research process. Engward and Davis (2015) state it is often the research design that is influenced. According to Gough (2016), reflexivity in qualitative research is an opportunity to add context and enrich the research process.

10.3 ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

My name is Zeenat Paruk. I am a third generation South African of Indian origin. I grew up in a small town called Ladysmith in the KwaZulu-Natal province of SA. I was born and raised in the Islamic faith.

At the tender age of three, I fell off a moving van and suffered a brachial plexus injury which left me with paralysis of my right hand. With limited medical technology or knowledge regarding nerve generation at the time, reconstructive surgery was the only means to allow me the use of only my right shoulder. Apart from this, movement and sensation from my elbow to my fingers is non-existent to this day.

This is perhaps parents' nightmare–to witness their child's life change in an instant. But, for me, it was the beginning of new challenges. Despite my limitation, I attended a mainstream school where I was treated just like my fellow able-bodied classmates. I never hesitated to pursue all kinds of activities despite the challenges I would have to overcome. I still very fondly recall meeting one of my best friends at a cricket match in which I played. This is testament to my compelling drive to be involved in all kinds of extramural activities.

After successful years at school, excelling in academics, leadership and drama, I went on to pursue a BCom Human Resources Management degree at the University of Pretoria. In my third year I bravely got married. I passed my degree Cum Laude and went on to have two beautiful children. Apart from breaking down disability barriers, I made the decision to get divorced–a taboo in the Indian Muslim community. For me, it was another step towards writing the pages of my life, and living it how I wanted to live it. There is no rule that states we should live by the expectations of society. It has always been my belief that we should always do that which will leave us with mental and emotional peace of mind. Being 25 at the time, with two children under 3 years old, it was time to rebuild Zeenat's life.

Gaining entry into the job market was difficult. Although I had completed my degree with excellent results, I was not considered for graduate development programmes due to my age. I did not have the experience to get into junior HR roles and it seemed to me as if all doors to enter the HR field were closed. Then an opportunity arose and I started my working career as a call centre agent, selling Coca-Cola. It was a wonderful job and I loved it thoroughly! After winning the Employee of the Month and Employee of the Quarter awards, I applied for a role in the logistics field. I had always

had a passion for HR, but with still no break-through in the field, I decided to pursue my honours degree in Industrial Psychology.

This was the year I had the privilege of being lectured by Professor Nasima Carrim for the first time. I still recall sitting in her first lecture; mesmerised by this Indian Muslim woman who had transcended many cultural barriers which I myself had been exposed to as an Indian Muslim female. To me, this outspoken Indian Muslim female became the bright light at the end of my own dark tunnel. For many years I had searched for a role model in the Indian Muslim female society. Armed with experiences and knowledge she spoke with great authority on diversity matters experienced within South Africa.

As honours students, we were paired with a supervisor to do a mini research project. I was paired with the late Professor Deon Meiring. Prof Meiring was a gentle soul. He was also stern and determined to make sure that students succeeded. I still remember submitting the first draft of my research project to him. I received a mark under 30 per cent! Professor Meiring called me in. He advised me, guided me, motivated me, and he reminded me of the potential and greatness that I have. It was these “pep talks” that resulted in me completing the module with a distinction. Professor Meiring rekindled the flame in me that I had, strangely, lost some time, somewhere, somehow … ‘that you can achieve anything that you set your mind on’.

My journey did not end there. I was still hungry to become a registered industrial psychologist. I applied for my MCom in Industrial Psychology also at the University of Pretoria. In the meantime, I had also finally managed to enter the HR domain and joined a leading professional services firm as an HR Administrator. This was now the true start to my career in HR!

Back to my master’s degree. Professor Carrim was my supervisor for my dissertation concerning the challenges facing Muslim women who wear hijab in the South African workplace. I was so excited and honoured to have her as my supervisor. Upon completion of my master’s degree, I also passed the Health Professions Council of South Africa’s board examinations. Finally, I was a registered industrial psychologist! I then bravely applied to pursue my PhD and was accepted once again at the University of Pretoria. I did not even have to think twice whom I wanted as my

supervisor. Professor Carrim kindly agreed to be my supervisor. It has been a long journey, but one that I am proud to have walked and I am forever grateful for Professor Carrim's support.

A very important point that I would like to highlight, is the various events that occurred in SA during the completion of my thesis. In 2020, we experienced the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic. As elsewhere in the world, our lives as South Africans had changed completely and forever overnight. All kinds of restrictions and recommendations by the World Health Organization took a significant toll on the 'normality' in the daily living and working lives of individuals, communities, and societies all over the world. We could not commute freely; we suffered isolation from families and friends; and were surrounded by death and despair as wave after wave of the pandemic brought more tragedies, worries, and terrible grief. As an HR professional, I supported many employees who were going through extreme trauma in dealing with the new way of living, with death, loss of employment, or who were themselves severely ill.

In July 2021, certain towns and cities in SA fell victim to looting sprees that lasted several days. At the time, I was in Ladysmith in KZN. Threats of violence and looting were very real in Ladysmith as well. Parts of the abattoir located a short distance away from my father's shop was destroyed due to an arson attack. We helplessly heard via community WhatsApp groups of potential threats to businesses by individuals seeking an opportunity to cause damage to property and start looting. Businesses were subsequently closed for almost two weeks.

The South African Police Services (SAPS) could not cope to protect the town and its residents. The army was eventually deployed. I was at my parents' home during this period. It was a time of living in extreme fear. Upon realising that the SAPS alone would not be able to contain the uprisings, men and women from the community undertook to patrol the streets and scout for threats of violence and uprisings. When my father would leave the house to fulfil his patrol duties, my mother and my children would remain at home with me. Everybody was on high alert; listening for voices or noises in fear that households would be attacked while the men were patrolling the streets.

At the same time, communities in Durban suffered immense problems as a result of the looting that had spilled over into the city. Food was on low supply, queues in supermarkets were exceptionally long, and fuel was running out. Several of the employees at the firm I worked in were emotionally and physically severely affected by their dire circumstances. Again, in my role as HR professional I supported these employees and regularly checked on their well-being.

It appeared as if tragedy and disasters would not end in Ladysmith. In January 2022 and March 2022, the town became flooded for the first time in many years after heavy rainfalls. Businesses in certain areas had to be closed as residents and owners waited for the water in the flooded streets to subside. The impact on my parents' livelihood was severe and their shop had to be closed.

I narrate these life events that occurred as each event was traumatic and long-drawn-out. Its impact on me, as an individual trying to deal with the situations in my own way (including giving attention to my family and children's well-being and their fears), while also offering support to employees in my workplace, it was quite an exhausting and emotionally hard period. I never mentioned any of these personal challenges and hardships to employees I supported and neither to any of the participants. Neither groups had any idea of the challenges I was going through as it was not appropriate for me to mention this when either offering counselling to others or interviewing the participants. What I do know, is that all of these events had built my resilience and strengthened my inner capacity to simply soldier on and pursue the completion of my thesis.

10.4 MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES: BOTH HAVE CHALLENGES

Ticking every box of being a minority representative in the workplace has not been without challenges. My religion and beliefs have often been overlooked. In my experience, people do not really understand Muslims; our beliefs regarding praying five times a day and fasting, our dress code which makes us stand out in the workplace, and our dietary requirements. There is a lot more that employers can do to accommodate Muslims in the workplace. It is interesting to note that Black African

people experience similar challenges. Despite being the majority population in the country, they are seldom accommodated or understood in the workplace. The participants found the topic interesting. I believe part of their interest was linked to the fact that my religious beliefs in terms of strictness in customs and rituals are very similar to theirs.

10.5 COVID-19 PANDEMIC

29 October 2020

> "*I cannot believe that in 3 days, I had conducted 5 interviews already. Using Teams or Zoom seemed to be a platform that was familiar to the participants. I cannot imagine how difficult it would have been to secure face-to-face interviews in the absence of the pandemic. It seems that COVID has had its positives.*"

The most fascinating aspect about this "thesising" is that it survived three eras. I started with my research proposal in the pre-pandemic era. I envisaged how I would conduct my interviews, coordinate travel arrangements and calendars with participants who were all very busy. For example, appointments for interviews had to be made weeks or even months in advance. I had heard rumours about cancellations, travelling problems, and many difficulties that could be encountered during the data collection process.

My research proposal was approved during the pandemic and at the time when SA was experiencing different levels of lockdowns. At the start of the level 5 lockdown, I was in Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal. It was quite a novelty to do the data collection in the convenience one's residence and via interviews that could be scheduled for either in the evenings or over weekends. It meant there was no infringement on participants' personal time as most confirmed they would be at home in any event.

10.6 INTEREST IN THE STUDY

17 November 2020

> "*Today I was taken aback. I was asked by a potential participant, why I, as an Indian female was interested in studying Africans in the workplace. She said to me, "not even Africans are interested in understanding us in the workplace!*"

My entry was clear. Black Africans feel isolated in the workplace because they have no voice. This woman's disbelief that I could show an interest in the black Africans' plight in the workplace saddened me because I had been there myself many times. At the same time, it reinstated my determination to bring attention to the real life of Black African employees who, by honouring their cultural beliefs and traditions, are scorned and even ridiculed in the modern Western workplace.

What interested me first and foremost to undertake this study, is my firm belief in acceptance when minorities and those from drastically diverse cultural and social backgrounds and traditions come together in the workplace. I further believe if all employees experience the diversity in the workplace in a positive way, harmony and effectiveness would result. It is close to my heart and something that I feel very passionate about. We are so aligned to assimilate a Western culture, to being forced to suppress our beliefs to blend in with others at work that even our own Black African colleagues would join in the furore to maintain their credibility as a 'good worker'. There was most definitely appreciation at the end of my interviews for taking on this research project.

10.7 WITCHCRAFT

03 December 2020

> "*I explained to a potential participant that I wanted to explore perceptions towards witchcraft within the workplace. The potential participant said she was not comfortable to explore this topic. Today, another person said she wanted to be a participant as she experienced witchcraft in the workplace but kept ignoring my calls and messages.*"

As a researcher, it is imperative to respect the views and personal space of the participants. The two potential participants who declined participation anewed my realisation that (a) witchcraft is really an extremely sensitive topic to investigate among black Africans, and (b) because of being a sensitive issue and the discomfort it causes, witchcraft *had to be* discussed. The comments received from the actual participants revealed that, although willing to talk about it, they still felt uneasy and were not as relaxed as when discussing, e.g., the calling. A further frustration experienced by

researchers is to somehow *know* a different participant would have been ideal to interview on a particular issue, but then did not commit her- or himself to participation. Yes, I was disappointed … but fortunately my background memory of the well-known saying, “the show must go on” kicked in and I was able to pull myself together and selected another participant.

10.8 TRANSCRIPTIONS

7 February 2021

> “*Deciding to do my own transcriptions of the interviews has been tedious. It is taking so long and it is starting to get frustrating. You really have to concentrate and listen and sometimes rewind several times to make sure you have correctly typed the dialogue. The good part is that I am now engaging with my data. I am getting closer to what each participant said and making notes as I go along.*”

Reflecting on my transcriptions, it was a blessing to do this by myself even though I felt it would take forever. Taking several hours to complete one interview exhausted me mentally and physically. Fortunately, I was able to deeply engage with the data because I am a very focussed person. It felt really good and satisfying when I actually began to see the bigger picture and could begin to put together the common threads that bound the themes at an early stage. The data collection process, which I thought would be the most difficult part of the study process, actually turned out to be easier than the transcriptions that followed.

10.9 A REAL CASE TO DEAL WITH

18 March 2021

> “*I cannot believe this. Today I received a call from an employee at my workplace, asking for assistance as he felt that he had a calling to become a sangoma! I could never have been more equipped to handle this case!*”

After having completed my interviews with the sangomas, receiving a call for help from this person was surreal at first. Requesting my support to help him deal with the calling, filled me with much gratification. Because of the knowledge I had gained by undertaking this study on this specific topic, I could actually understand the

perspective where he was coming from and the physical and emotional turmoil he was experiencing. As the HR manager my role was to explain to management that it is not uncommon for medical results to be clear if a Black African person has been called. On the other hand, the person who has been called does feel physically exceptionally ill and suffer immense psycho-social trauma when he or she receives a calling. I again realised why a study like mine was so important and how it can actually help other HR professionals to deal with such cases if and when they occur in the workplace.

10.10 INDIANS AND BLACK AFRICANS

5 July 2021

> "*Several participants drew comparisons between Indians and Africans. But they mentioned that the beliefs and practices of Indians is more accepted than that of Africans. This was an interesting point!*"

I was trying to understand why this would be the case? Why would the participants perceive the religious and cultural beliefs of Indians to be more accepted in the workplace than that of black Africans? Reflecting on the reason why such statements were made, I had to go back to the cultural history during the era of apartheid in SA when Indians were treated like second class citizens. Indians were accepted more than black Africans. Could this be the link as to why the beliefs of Indians are more acceptable in modern SA? As I discovered more participants had this view, I became more and more upset. If this is indeed the case, it means that the legacy of apartheid is continuing…?

10.11 THE BLACK AFRICAN CULTURE

14 November 2021

> "*The cultural beliefs and practices of the African people is very rich. There is a huge sense of community, family and being there for each other. I have included information regarding all of these practices in my analysis but this is not related to my study.*"

A great deal of data was collected on the actual practising of Black African traditional cultural practices. The different traditional rituals and religious ceremonies in terms of

births, deaths, and weddings practices were described in much detail. I removed all of this information as it was not related to the workplace. It could actually serve as a departure point for anthropological research studies. What I found most interesting and fascinating were that most of the participants expressed a huge sense of pride when discussing their beliefs and practices. The interviews gave them the opportunity to share exactly what happens at the different milestones in their tribal communities with an 'outsider'. I showed my appreciation and admiration for the proud way in which they individually shared their culture and beliefs with me and told each of them that I could sense how an important part of their lives each one's cultural heritage was.

10.12 THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

25 February 2022

> "*The data has revealed many themes and subthemes. Reworking these using mindmaps has helped.*"

Using grounded theory really allowed for rich data to be produced in this study. Participants shared information regarding their cultural beliefs during various life stages, which was not necessarily linked to the workplace. However, it contributed to a greater understanding of the participants cultural beliefs, their sense of community and the value that they plave on these cultural beliefs. Experiences related to the workplace was extracted from the data and I had to employ a strategy to connect the data and link all the themes and subthemes. Using mindmaps to link all the themes and subthemes was really useful in the write-up of the analysis. Many quotes were applicable to more than on theme, but this data had to be synthesised to find the most suitable under each theme. The chapters also had to be reworked. From Chapter 1 of the analysis, I had to cluster the data together under three additional themes (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) to deal with (Chapter 5) the factors that influenced cultural beliefs, (Chapter 6) the workplace, and finally (Chapter 7) their experiences of discrimination. One challenge that I experienced is that I found all the quotes of the participants meaningful, which led to repition in the write up of my analysis. With the guidance of Professor Carrim and reworking my data several times, I was able to select the most apprpropriate quote to describe the phenomena.

10.13 NEARING THE END

The journey of this thesis has been remarkable. It has been riddled with feelings of excitement, pain when there was slow progress and a true feeling of relief. I am optimistic that this thesis will add value to professionals within the South African workplace.

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ANNEXURE A:

EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for employees

1. What is your understanding of indigenous cultural beliefs? Provide examples.
2. What type of indigenous cultural beliefs are practiced within your society?
3. What about the workplace? Do you feel that individuals come into the workplace with indigenous cultural beliefs that are practiced in their homes and communities?
4. Do you display your indigenous cultural beliefs in the workplace?
5. Do you feel discriminated against or stigmatized due to your indigenous cultural beliefs?
6. I have a short story for you. What do you think about this? Employee A was promoted a week ago to a middle management position. She is young and extremely intelligent. Employee B is older (in her 40s) and really wanted the promotion but cannot get ahead in the organisation. Since Employee A has been promoted she found dirt in front of her office door the day after she was promoted. On the second day she found a rubbery substance on her car wheel. The third day she became very ill and went to hospital. The doctors cannot find out what is wrong with her. What do you think is happening to Employee A?
7. What are your perceptions towards muthi in the workplace?
8. Do you feel that people use ‘muthi’ to get ahead in the workplace (in a negative way)?
9. Do you feel that people use ‘muthi’ to protect themselves from others in the workplace?
10. Do you feel that people who are not African fear the words sangoma and muthi?
11. Do you feel that non-Africans are educated regarding the cultural beliefs of Africans?
12. What can organizations do to accommodate your cultural beliefs in the workplace?

Questions for HR managers

1. What is your understanding of indigenous beliefs? Provide examples.

2. What about the workplace? Do you feel that individuals come into the workplace with indigenous beliefs that are practiced in their homes and communities?
3. Are there complaints from employees regarding indigenous beliefs being practiced/displayed in the workplace?
4. Have you dealt with any cases regarding discrimination/stigmatization related to indigenous beliefs in the workplace?
5. I have a short story for you. What do you think about this? Employee A was promoted a week ago to a middle management position. She is young and extremely intelligent. Employee B is older (in her 40s) and really wanted the promotion but cannot get ahead in the organisation. Since Employee A has been promoted she found dirt in front of her office door the day after she was promoted. On the second day she found a rubbery substance on her car wheel. The third day she became very ill and went to hospital. The doctors cannot find out what is wrong with her. What do you think is happening to Employee A?
6. What do you believe are employee perceptions towards muthi in the workplace?

Questions for traditional healers

1. What is your understanding of indigenous beliefs? Provide examples.
2. What about the workplace? Do you feel that individuals come into the workplace with indigenous beliefs that are practiced in their homes and communities?
3. Do you support employees who have problems in the workplace?
4. What is the extent of the support provided?
5. What do you believe are employee perceptions towards muthi in the workplace?

ANNEXURE B:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent

Dept. of Human Resources Management

Exploring Indigenous Cultural Beliefs of black Africans in the South African Workplace

Research conducted by:

Ms. Z. Paruk (24190285)
Cell: 064 754 7858

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Zeenat Paruk, Doctoral student from the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the study is to study the indigenous cultural beliefs of Africans in the South African workplace.

Please note the following:

- This study involves conducting an interview with you. The interview data will be treated as strictly confidential. The interview will be recorded to assist the researcher to accurately capture the participants' insights in their own words. No other person will have access to the audio recordings except the researcher. Should you feel uncomfortable with the recording of the interview, you may request for the recorder to be turned off.

- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. You are also welcome to ask any questions related to this study before signing this consent form.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request.
    - Please contact my study leader, Professor N.M.H. Carrim (012 420 2466 / nasima.carrim@up.ac.za) if you have any further questions or comments regarding the study.

In research of this nature, the study leader may wish to contact respondents to verify the authenticity of data gathered by the researcher. It is understood that any personal contact details that you may provide will be used only for this purpose, and will not compromise your anonymity or the confidentiality of your participation.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

_____ _____

Participant's signature **Date**

ANNEXURE C:

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER FROM UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Approval Certificate

19 October 2020

Miss Z Paruk
Department: Human Resource Management

Dear Miss Z Paruk

The application for ethical clearance for the research project described below served before this committee on:

Protocol No:	EMS162/20
Principal researcher:	Miss Z Paruk
Research title:	Exploring indigenous beliefs of black Africans in the South African workplace.
Student/Staff No:	24190285
Degree:	Doctoral
Supervisor/Promoter:	Prof N Mohamed Hoosen Carrim
Department:	Human Resource Management

The decision by the committee is reflected below:

Decision:	Approved
Conditions (if applicable):	
Period of approval:	2020-10-05 - 2021-12-31

The approval is subject to the researcher abiding by the principles and parameters set out in the application and research proposal in the actual execution of the research. The approval does not imply that the researcher is relieved of any accountability in terms of the Codes of Research Ethics of the University of Pretoria if action is taken beyond the approved proposal. If during the course of the research it becomes apparent that the nature and/or extent of the research deviates significantly from the original proposal, a new application for ethics clearance must be submitted for review.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

pp PROF JA NEL
CHAIR: COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS

Fakulteit Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe
Lefapha la Disaense tša Ekonomi le Taolo

ANNEXURE D:

LETTER FROM EDITOR (SUZETTE M. BOTES)

Suzette M. Botes

FULL MEMBER: Professional Editors' Guild

(BOT018)

05 October 2022

I, Suzette Marié Botes, confirm that I have edited the doctoral research study prepared for the degree PhD (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Pretoria

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS BELIEFS OF BLACK AFRICANS IN THE

SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE

Student name: **ZEENAT PARUK**

Student number: **24190285**

Please note: The accuracy of the final work remains the responsibility of the author.

The edit included the following:

- Spelling & vocabulary
- Punctuation & grammar (tenses; pronoun matches; word choice etc.)
- Consistency in terminology, italisation, etc.
- Sentence construction, paragraph structuring, and linking
- Suggestions for text with unclear meaning
- Logic, relevance, clarity, consistency, accuracy, simplicity
- Checking reference list against in-text sources
- Edited in accordance with the rules regulating BRITISH OXFORD ENGLISH
- Editing guide used: APA

Thank you kindly

Suzette M. Botes

060 619 3137

suzette.botes.21@gmail.com

LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER/EDITOR/FACILITATOR:

Aston University (UK)

Consortium for Language and Dimensional Dynamics (CLDD)

Health Advance Institute (HAI)

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA)

Stellenbosch University (US)

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)

University of Johannesburg (UJ)

University of Pretoria (UP)

University of South Africa (Unisa)