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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

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

Alta van As

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**University of Pretoria
Department of Music**

Supervisor: Prof Caroline van Niekerk

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To my Mother and Father
With great appreciation



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

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

(Peterson 1993:141)



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Abstract

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

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

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

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



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

Keywords:

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