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# **THE NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF MICRO-INEQUITIES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN COMPANY**

By

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Date

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## ABSTRACT

Organisations can not realize their business objectives without employees. This means that employees are the most critical asset which organisations should be focusing on with much attention to their effectiveness. The work environment is considered to play a critical role in ensuring employee effectiveness which is supported by factors such as behaviours and actions of employees and the way they treat each other. These forms of behaviours and actions are classified as micro-inequities in this study. Currently there is no evidence of the prevalence of micro-inequities in South African organisations. The study examines the existence and nature of micro-inequities in a South African organisation.

The study was conducted among eight employees of a global South African organisation based in Johannesburg South Africa. Qualitative data was collected by means of conducting semi-structured interviews which were recorded by using an audio recorder and written notes. The data provided broad insight on the experiences and perceptions of participants with regard to micro-inequities in the organisation. Thematic coding was used to identify themes as provided by participants.

Based on in-depth analysis of the data on Social constructivist grounded theory guidelines, it is evident that micro-inequities do exist in the South African organisation. The existence of micro-inequities was underpinned by the experiences and perceptions as provided from the participant's responses during the interviews. The results of the study indicate support for the reviewed literature on the types of micro-inequities existing in organisations. The results further demonstrate that micro-inequities have a negative impact on the effective functioning of employees. The study has created a foundation for further research, particularly in organisations in South Africa.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Organisations cannot function effectively without employees, which are considered to be their most important assets. This calls for organisations to look after their employees. When employees are not happy as a result of something which is wrong in the organisation, this could lead to negative consequences for the organisation. The way employees conduct themselves and treat others plays a critical role in the workplace. Researchers like Rowe (1990) and Hinton (2003) introduced the concept of micro-inequities to classify some of the behaviour and actions often demonstrated by employees in the workplace. These researchers recognised the huge impact that micro-inequities pose to both organisations and employees.

#### 1.2 Background

Imagine if you were to think twice before entering your office at work, due to what had happened the previous day. You are angry, hurt and confused and are not sure if you should be talking to someone at the office about the bad incident that you have experienced. Well this is what some people might be experiencing at their work places as a result of the behaviour and actions of their colleagues. The way in which employees are treated plays a significant role to the culture of the organisational. Most organisations in South Africa subscribe to the value of respect since they understand the effect it has on individuals. Unfortunately in certain instances, people experience the opposite of respect, where they are subjected to negative behaviours which disrespects and devalues their dignity and self-worth. These types of negative behaviours and actions can be classified as micro-inequities.

Micro-inequities were named by Rowe (1974). Micro-inequities are the invisible force that results in employees leaving their jobs (Rowe, 2008). These behaviours and actions may be small but they seem to have a serious negative impact on both employees and organisations. Micro-inequities may not be visible, but they are obviously felt by the receiver. The challenge would be how to point them out or to ensure that they are considered as real issues, in order for organisations to allocate time to attend to them.

After an extensive search of literature around micro-inequities, the author could not find any research focusing on micro-inequities in South African workplaces. Most studies found were conducted overseas. Currently there is no evidence of the prevalence of micro-inequities in the South Africa. Chering and Tate (2008) argue that everyone has experienced micro-inequities in the workplace and that no-one is excluded. If the preceding statement is true, it means that from a Human Resource point of view, there is a gap in the understanding of what is happening to employees, as the phenomenon is not familiar in our count South Africa. As Hinton (2003) has mentioned that micro-inequities may be subconscious at times, this means that employees could hurt each other without being aware. This creates a need to understand micro-inequities in the South African work context from both an academic and Human Resource practitioner's perspective and to educate employees about this phenomenon. Although the issue of micro-inequities might be perceived as wasting time on small issues, it is advisable for organisations to use every opportunity in today's competitive environment to promote a positive image of their culture and care for employees. Research findings could contribute significantly to making people aware of their own behaviour and the impact they have on others.

Moynahan (2009:2) mentioned that everybody commits micro-inequities, which means that employees might be subjected to micro-inequities on a daily basis as they interact with their colleagues. Hinton (2003) argue that employees send about 150 micro-messages to their colleagues in a 10 minute conversation. This revelation poses a concern on what organisations are doing to combat this kind of behaviours. Spending time on every potential threat, even the small ones, could benefit an organisation's corporate culture

(Lee, 2006). Corporate image is very important since it can play a critical role in the attraction of new employees and building of relationships with new customers and partners. Micro-inequities affect the overall productivity and health of organisations (Young, 2006). Moynahan (2009:3) mentioned that in organisations where majority of employees feel valued by their colleagues and line managers, the staff morale, retention level, productivity and profits are high. It is therefore important to understand the experiences that employees go through and the effects that micro-inequities may have on employees in the South African workplace, in order to pro-actively prevent and positively manage these behaviours and actions.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Despite the introduction of this phenomenon in the 1970's, there is still not much research focus on the South African work context. The absence of literature on research done in South Africa, questions the existence of micro-inequities in the country. As a result one cannot safely conclude that, based on the existing studies that were conducted overseas, micro-inequities do exist in South African organisations or in all organisations. Although researchers like Chering and Tate (2008) argue that everyone has been subjected to micro-inequities, the question of whether micro-inequities do exist in South Africa and the nature thereof still remain uncertain until studies are conducted. The proposed study will then aim to narrow the knowledge gap on what is happening in South African work places, which will also increase the existing academic literature on this phenomenon. Researchers may gain insight which could contribute to developing additional literature in areas such as human behaviour or human dynamics, factors influencing corporate culture and on developing interventions to support employees and in creating healthy working environments. The acquired knowledge will also add a new angle to the existing literature which will validate the current general conclusions by previous researchers on micro-inequities.

## **1.4 Purpose statement**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the existence and the nature of micro-inequities in a South African organisation.

## **1.5 Research objectives**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation
- To determine the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation
- To determine the impact of micro-inequities on employees
- To establish the organisation's support measures, processes and intervention aimed at managing micro-inequities

The above research objectives will be explored in more detail through the questions which will be asked to the participants in this study.

## **1.6 Academic value and contribution of the study**

Inclusive behaviour within the organisation is considered to be a critical component in achieving a culture that values and respects employees, which may result in improving employee engagement, motivation, retention and morale as cited by Moynahan (2009). As negative behaviours like micro-inequities have the potential to destroy employees and the culture of organisations, it is important for organisations to be aware of this behaviours. Based on existing studies of researchers such as Rowe (1990), Hinton (2003) and Chering and Tate (2008) which were conducted outside South Africa, there is no evidence or knowledge of micro-inequities in South Africa. As Chering and Tate (2008) argue that micro-inequities exist in every organisation, this creates a significant gap of insight into whether micro-inequities do exist in the South African workplace, their nature and the impact they have on employees. As it is argued by Chering and Tate (2008) that every person who has ever been an employee has been subjected to micro-inequities, it is

justifiable to make an effort to understand this phenomenon and investigate it further, as it is suggested that it has negative impact on employees and organisations.

## 1.7 Delimitations of the study

This study intends to build knowledge and narrow the gap in the literature by investigating the possibility of the existence of micro-inequities in the South African workplace and to enlighten organisational behaviour researchers on new insight into behaviour that may negatively affect corporate culture and harm the wellbeing of employees. The study will further provide practical information to Human Resource Practitioners of the organisation that is used for this study, in order to assist them in their journey of continuously building an inclusive corporate culture which values and respects employees. The organisation will also benefit by creating a culture where employees are aware of the types and effects of micro-inequities and be encouraged to attempt to eliminate them in support of healthy working relationships.

## 1.8 Definitions of key terms

**The key terms to be used in this study are defined as follows:**

**Bullying** “is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour with the intention to undermine or humiliate the recipient “(Acas, 2005).

**Deviant behaviour** “is behaviour that is contrary to policy rules, values and regulations” (Petersen, 2002).

**Interpersonal discrimination** “is a set of behaviours that negatively impacts employees within the workplace context” (Ruggs, Martinez & Hebi, 2011).

**Micro-affirmations** “are apparently small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard to see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur when people wish to help others to succeed” (Rowe, 2008).

**Micro-aggressions** “can be overt or covert but they are most damaging when they occur outside the level of the conscious awareness of well-intentioned perpetrators” (Sue, 2010).

**Micro-inequities** “are small events which are often ephemeral and hard to prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognised by the perpetrator which occur whenever people are perceived to be different” (Rowe, 2008).

**Micro-messages:** “communicating with other human beings through visual, audible, sublingual means” (Young, 2003).

**Rankism:** “violation of dignity” (Fuller & Gerloff, 2008).

## **1.9 The structure of the research report**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study**

This chapter introduces the study to be conducted and stipulates the rationale for conducting the study.

### **Chapter 2: Micro-Inequities: A theoretical perspective**

The content of this chapter addresses the definitions of the concept of micro-inequities, the theoretical overview which includes the origin of the phenomenon and different classifications of micro-inequities.

### **Chapter 3: The impact of micro-inequities and existing recommended solutions**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on the impact that micro-inequities have on both employees and organisations. The chapter will further indicate the existing recommended solutions as suggested by various researchers.

### **Chapter 4: Research Design**

This chapter covers an overview description of the research methodology applied in the study. The description addresses aspects such as the strategy of inquiry, data collection, sampling and data analysis techniques.

### **Chapter 5: Data analysis and results**

This chapter provides the analysis and the results obtained in this study.

### **Chapter 6: Discussion of results**

This chapter indicates the discussions of the results of this study.

### **Chapter 7: Limitations of the study**

This chapter indicates the limitations and challenges experienced while conducting this study.

### **Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations**

This will be the last chapter presenting the conclusion and the recommendations. A list of references will be provided at the end of the report.





## CHAPTER 2

### MICRO-INEQUITIES: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### 2.1 Introduction

The content of this chapter addresses the concept of micro-inequities as part of organisational behaviour in the workplace. The theoretical aspect which creates an understanding of the origin of micro-inequities, definitions of the concept and the various classifications with examples will also be discussed. Micro-inequities include elements such as actions, words, tone of voices or a gesture Culbreath (2010). The researcher further states that the inequity can be a deliberated attempt to harm someone or it can also be unintentional as a result of a person's perceptions about others. The challenge occurs when the negative perceptions influence how employees treat each other in the work place, which as a result may contribute to the culture of an organisation.

#### 2.2 Organisational behaviour

Organisational behaviour is a critical subject that plays a significant role in the activities of the human resource department. This is one of the important areas that should be keeping the human resource practitioners busy. Organisations are made of individuals coming from different backgrounds and belief systems which contribute to the way they behave and treat their colleagues even the way they respond to circumstances. Each individual views the world differently and this may have an impact on the culture that the employees will collectively create. Organisational culture may be defined as the norms and values that are embraced by a particular organisation (Smith, 2010). The challenge for every organisation is to ensure that the employees subscribe to its norms and live the values on a daily basis. These norms and values will obviously be expected to be demonstrated by the actions and behaviour of employees. Most organisations have a code of conduct which is normally

shared with employees immediately after joining the organisation. The code of conduct often defines how employees should behave in the organisation which is in line with what the organisation believes in. Employees are therefore encouraged to comply to the code of conduct.

According to Smith (2010), organisational culture can be tackled in three realms which are:

- Assumptions and beliefs
- Behaviour and artefacts
- Values

Smith (2010) argues that assumptions and beliefs indicate the underlying values that some organisations take for granted. He further states that values are more internal and are only expressed through behaviour. It may be difficult to influence or to attempt to change someone else's beliefs since the individual belief systems, values and assumptions are often influenced by people around them and some are learned from childhood. All the above elements should be understood by both human resource practitioners and managers in order to be addressed with the aim of influencing a positive organisational culture.

### **2.3 Definitions of micro-inequities**

Various researchers defined micro-inequities. For the purpose of this study, only seven definitions will be discussed as follows:

#### **Beagan (2001)**

“Micro-inequities are every day practices of inclusion and exclusion cumulatively conveying messages about who does and who does not truly belong”. This definition indicates that micro-inequities take place on a daily basis. The core message here is that the treatment is based on the aspect of social belonging. Organisations often have teams and groups which are mostly formed on the basis of certain similarities or interests that

group members share. The problem exists when a group has a negative impact on the people who are outside it, especially if they are treated negatively.

### **Hinton (2003)**

“Micro-inequities are subtle messages, sometimes subconscious, that devalues, discourage and ultimately impair performance in the workplace”. According to this definition micro-inequities may not be obvious and may also hinder the receiver from functioning effectively. The main point is that they are negative since they may result in unpleasant consequences for the performance of the organisation.

### **Lublin (2004)**

“Micro-inequities are subconscious phenomena which include subtle put-downs, dismissive gestures and sarcastic tones that can snap motivation”. Lublin’s definition is comprised of the same elements as those of Beagan (2001). The commonality is that micro-inequities are subconscious and that they are discouraging. Another critical aspect of this definition is that they can be in the form of gestures or the voice of the sender which is in line with the definition by Culbreath (2010). People do demonstrate different gestures for different reasons, it depends on the message they are trying to send. The assumption with the voice is that perhaps it could be demonstrated by a person who is shouting or raising their voice in a disrespectful way.

### **Moynahan (2008)**

“Micro-inequities are micro-messages we send other people that cause them to feel devalued, discouraged or excluded”. With this definition it is obvious that the receiver does not feel good about the message received. At times people do not care about how others feel. In many cultures people are taught that one should treat others the way they would like to be treated. One wonders how it feels to deliberately treat other people negatively.

### **Rowe (2008)**

“Micro-inequities are small events which are often ephemeral and hard to prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognised by the perpetrator which occur whenever people are perceived to be different”. This definition indicates that micro-inequities are the small acts which may sometimes be seen as non-issues since some people may not notice them. However, this definition introduces a new angle, namely that micro-inequities take place when the sender views other people to be different from him or herself and as a result, treats them differently.

### **Sue (2010)**

“Micro-inequities are subtle verbal or nonverbal slights that convey rudeness or insensitivity and demean a member of a minority group”. Based on this definition, micro-inequities may be what people say to others and also the actions that people may demonstrate towards others in a disrespectful way. The gist of this definition is that the message sent is not positive and its intention is to insult the receiver either by words or actions.

### **Young (2006)**

“They are cumulative, repeated behaviours that devalue, discourage and impair performance in the workplace. They inevitably affect the overall productivity and health of a company. This definition highlights that for behaviour or actions to be classified as micro-inequities it means that they do not only occur once, they perpetuate. Young also agrees with other authors by stating that they have a negative impact on the performance and the culture of the organisation. “Micro-inequities are micro messages which form the foundation of our communication, a principle that applies across nations and cultures” (Young, 2006). The interpretation of this statement could mean that micro-inequities inform the messages that people send to each other in their interactions with one another. The definition also highlights that micro-inequities exist within all groups irrespective of who the

person is and where they come from. It is interesting that Young (2006) believes micro-inequities do not belong only to a particular group, but that they occur across all nations and cultures.

The listed definitions acknowledge that micro-inequities are generally communication messages that individuals use on a daily basis. Furthermore, the definitions clearly indicate that micro-inequities are negative. Researchers like Rowe (2008) believe that micro-inequities take place in the event where a person is perceived to be different. It is also evident from the definitions that the sender may deliberately plan to harm the receiver, however it was also mentioned that the sender may be totally unaware of the impact of what they are saying or doing to the receiver. The challenge lies in the fact that, whether the sender was unaware or the negative message was unintentional, the impact is still not pleasant on either the receiver or the organisation. It is interesting to note that a person may harm another without being aware. The other critical aspect arising from the definitions is the fact that it may be difficult to pinpoint a micro-inequity even when it exists, which might make it difficult for the receiver to complain and as a result, the negative behaviour of the perpetrator may continue.

For the purpose of this study, based on the elements of the listed definitions, micro-inequities will be defined as negative behaviour and actions in the workplace which are either known or not known by the sender but are unwelcome to the receiver, since they have negative effects on the feelings and emotions of the receiver.

## **2.4 An overview of micro-inequities in the workplace**

### **2.4.1 The origin of the concept of micro-inequities**

The word micro-inequities, was introduced in 1973 by Rowe (1974). This phenomenon was used to describe all the minor and indirect offenses that decrease employee morale (Lee, 2006). Rowe was given the responsibility of learning about race and gender exclusions and on how the workplace could improve with respect to people who were

under-represented (Fiofiori et al., 2007). Rowe (2008:6), states that part of the learning gained during the process was the evidence of the importance of small acts such as disrespect in the workplace. Rowe then began writing about micro-inequities and defined them as “apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard to prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognised by the perpetrator which occur whenever people are perceived to be different” (Rowe, 2008). Rowe believes that micro-inequities as a form of subtle discrimination are the cause of segregation between nations (Hinton, 2003).

Rowe (2008) acknowledged that micro-inequities were a serious issue but since they were mostly unconscious and often not recognised they were often not believed to exist and it was difficult to describe them. The same challenge may exist in many organisations, even in the South African workplace where employees may be suffering as victims of micro-inequities. Hoogervors et al., (2004:289) state that it is important to remember that any particular form of organisational culture is affected by the way employees, employers and shareholders communicate with each other. The emphasis is that micro-inequities exist when people are interacting. “Human interactions deal with group and individual behaviour as people are regarded as social beings (Hoogervors et al., 2004:289).” Every culture is regarded as the right one by its people, the challenge occurs when someone is with people who are from a different culture. What is right in one culture may not necessarily be accepted by all other cultures. This concern might be part of the reasons that made organisations to introduce diversity initiatives in order to educate and create awareness about different cultures.

Rowe (1990) suggests that micro-inequities are often difficult to detect or to be sure about. She continues by mentioning that micro-inequities are often reported more where powerful people have offended less powerful people. Rowe (2008:1) states that often the perpetrators are people who are more powerful than their victims. This can at times be difficult to either retaliate or confront the perpetrator Rowe (2008) believes that the victims of micro-inequities are the people who are perceived to be different from the perpetrator especially on a race and gender basis. Holder-Winfield (2010) agrees with Rowe in saying

that the likelihood of encountering micro-inequities increases when someone is perceived to be different. South Africa is very diverse and the workplaces are also represented by people who are different from each other and to make the work environment pleasant for everyone is to first acknowledge and accept the differences.

According to Rowe (1990:155), “in a traditionally white male atmosphere, it is much harder to get certain kinds of micro-inequities to stop due to the fact that some of the slights are culturally so normal that they may not be noticed as micro-inequities”. As much as cultures are different, the need for respect cuts across all nations and cultures, which is why it is difficult for one to believe that disrespecting people can be accepted as normal. Most reviewed studies by researches like Rowe (1990), Rowe (2008), Fiorori et al., (2007) and Young (2003) confirm that micro-inequities do exist in different forms and that their impact on employees and the organisation is severe. Moynahan (2009) argues that micro-inequities occur in all cultures, within both genders and in every age group. The preceding statement emphasizes that micro-inequities can happen to everyone. Sue (2010) suggests that these behaviours are informed by stereotypes and the way people make their decisions about how they treat other people. It would be a good thing for everyone to be aware of the impact that their stereotypes have on other people.

“Micro-inequities are actions which reasonable people would agree, are unjust toward individuals, when the particular treatment of the individual occurs only because of a group characteristic unrelated to creativity and work performance Rowe (1990:153)”. Moynahan (2008) argues that a diversity challenge that most people experience is that people tend to value what is similar and reject what is different. He further states that it is a human tendency to behave in this manner. It is sad to learn that people can be treated negatively based on who they are and what they are perceived to represent.

Although organisations do develop policies, procedures and initiatives to encourage a diverse and inclusive culture, employees still continue to subject their colleagues to micro-inequities (Moynahan, 2008). Perpetrators are usually unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient of the communication (Sue, 2010). It is not

convincing enough that anyone could demean others without being aware of having done so, even though it could be unintentional. This indicates that perpetrators could turn the situation around by playing the victim while the actual victims are perceived to be oversensitive. Human Resource departments have the responsibility of ensuring that their diversity initiatives combat these types of behavior. Expecting individuals to break the stereotypes that they have built over a long period of time could be a huge challenge to all practitioners who deal with organisational behavior.

## **2.5 Classification of micro-inequities**

Lim and Cortina (2005) argues that in recent years there has been an increase in milder forms of workplace interpersonal mistreatment which are categorised as emotional abuse, bullying and generalised workplace abuse. They further stated that such behaviour is characterised by verbal aggression like swearing, disrespect such as interruption while a person is talking and humiliation in front of other people. These kinds of behaviour relate very well to the description of micro-inequities in the workplace. Micro-inequities will therefore be classified according to five categories of negative behaviour and actions found to be prevalent in the workplace, namely micro-messages, interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviour, rankism and deviant behaviour. It is acknowledged that there may be additional negative forms of behaviour and actions which are affecting both the employees and the organisation as a whole. For the purpose of this study the focus will be limited to the five previously mentioned categories. These categories will be discussed as follows:

### **2.5.1 Micro-messaging**

Young (2006:90) states that micro-messaging indicates how much people are valued and respected by others. Often when people have a high regard for others, they treat them with respect and those that are disregarded and devalued are sometimes not respected. The way in which micro-inequities are describes it can be assumed that this phenomenon can indicate the truth about how people feel about others, without verbalising their



opinions. Although some people have the ability to hide their feelings, there are still those who might find it difficult to pretend. Young (2003), mentions that as people often do not take time to reflect and inquire on the cause of the reasons behind why they dislike other people. It could be suggested that as Sue (2010) has said, the trigger could be the stereotypes that people have about others and that could lead to the way they will choose to treat other people. The truth is that there are always reasons which might be sub-conscious for any decision taken.

“Micro-messages reveal what is behind our mask including hidden assumptions that connect under-achievement in the workplace with race, gender, class and appearance (Young, 2003).” Every person has assumptions about anything or anyone on earth and unfortunately, if the assumptions are acted upon, they could lead to serious damage. It is not easy to change one’s assumptions. Young (2003:43) states that micro-messages are small, sometimes unspoken, often unconscious messages we constantly send and receive that have a powerful impact on our interactions with others. One can imagine the feelings of employees who receive negative micro-messages at work, as they may not look forward to go to work.

Young (2003:2) mentioned that if micro-messages are not challenged, they can accumulate and may result in affecting the self-esteem of the victim. Behaving as if negative micro-messaging do not exist could be a danger to both the employees and organisations. It is crucial for organisations to empower employees to stand up for themselves and not stand to be victims. Many organisations have policies and codes of conduct which provide guidelines on how employees should behave and treat each other. It is therefore of great concern to imagine how the perpetrators could defy the company policies, unless the policy condones this behaviour which is highly unlikely.

### **2.5.2 Interpersonal discrimination**

Ruggs et al., (2011) describe interpersonal discrimination as more subtle and consisting of non-verbal actions such as avoiding eye contact, grimacing, and verbal actions such as

dismissive language and para-verbal behaviour such as tone of voice that occur in face-to-face interactions. One of the problems with interpersonal discrimination is that it is often very subtle and frequently goes unrecognised by members that are not historically targets of discrimination (Ruggs et al., 2011). These statements support what Rowe (2008) mentioned in her definition of micro-inequities that they are subtle and unrecognised. However one could disagree with the point that people who were not historically discriminated against tend not to recognise them. It could be suggested that irrespective of who the person is and their past experience, everybody has feelings and at times experiences the same feelings despite the differences in background, race and other distinguishing factors. If someone has been devalued they will definitely feel it. The above statement conflicts with what was mentioned by Chering and Tate (2008), that everyone has experienced micro-inequities in one way or another in the workplace.

Singletary (2009) argues that experimentally inducing interpersonal discrimination resulted in lower performance scores on an in-basket task and an attention resources task. He further mentioned that these detriments to performance were more significant than when no discrimination occurred. In reality, there will always be discrimination, people will always be treated differently and the danger occurs when the different treatments are negative and impacts on the other person or the organisation negatively. Perhaps if people were to be more aware of their actions and the impact they have on other people, this could minimise the demonstration of interpersonal discrimination.

### **2.5.3 Toxic behaviours**

“Toxic behaviours in the workplace come in many forms, from overt forms of bullying and ridicule to insidious behaviours that undermine individuals” (Jetson, 2005). He further states that employees are four times more likely to be bullied than sexually harassed and in 75% of cases, will leave their jobs. The challenge in this case takes place when employees leave without disclosing the truth about their reasons for leaving, as the perpetrator might find a new victim and this toxic behaviour may never be addressed. According to Jetson (2005:4), bad workplace behaviours and practices contribute to 30-

50% of stress-related illnesses at work. The more the victim keeps quiet, the more likely they will endanger their health. At times it would depend on how safe and conducive the culture of the organisation is. It should be either encouraging or supportive of the victims to disclose problems, with a guarantee that action will be taken.

Kusey and Holloway (2009) suggest that toxic people thrive only in toxic systems and also believe that these toxic people are part of a complex system which is the source of their power. Toxic employees can only survive if their bad behaviour is not addressed with serious consequences. Steiner (2004) argues that in a healthy work environment, toxic employees will be recognized and either get the punishment or be removed, whereas in toxic environments, they will be rewarded. Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007) add to this by stating that toxicity in the workplace appears to come from toxins within the organisation which renders it a toxic organisation. They further state that toxicity is real in all organisations but they emphasize that not all organisations are toxic. The question to consider would be how employees of toxic organizations are engaging with their partners, suppliers and most importantly their customers. Obviously they would demonstrate the same behavior, since it is part of the organisational culture. The other concern that the author has is how a toxic organization could attract employees who are not toxic, unless they only appoint toxic employees with toxicity as a requirement to meet the placement criteria which is unlikely.

#### **2.5.3.1 Examples of toxic behaviours in the workplace by Jetson (2005), Kusey and Holloway (2009):**

- Unreasonable or constant reprimands, insults, sarcasm, criticism
- Unnecessary interference with a person's workspace
- Unjustified and unnecessary comments about a person's work
- Isolating a person from normal conversations
- Stealing the credit of others work
- Creation of a climate of fear by passive aggression
- Sabotaging colleagues and passive hostility

All the toxic behaviours listed above can have a potential to make the receiver feel worthless. If employees were to behave in this manner, then the work environment would not be a pleasant environment for the victims and for other employees who may be witnessing the listed behaviours. Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007) suggest that the only way to combat the success of toxic behaviours is to recognize and identify who and what the toxins are and where they are placed in the organisation. This calls for Human Resource practitioners to be equipped with appropriate knowledge on micro-inequities, since it is their responsibility to facilitate a healthy culture that supports and respects employees. Without this kind of knowledge they will not know how to address complaints from victims. Neither will they know which appropriate interventions they should design in order to address micro-inequities.

#### **2.5.4 Rankism**

Fuller and Gerloff (2008) define rankism as violation of dignity. They state that rankism may take the form of maltreatment, humiliation and intimidation. This is another form of micro-inequities which devalue and disrespect an individual. Fuller and Gerloff (2008) indicate that rankism occurs when someone with power threatens those with less power in ways that violate their dignity. Experiencing violation of dignity at the hands of others is not limited to those at the bottom of the hierarchy (Fuller & Gerloff, 2008). This statement supports the argument by Chering and Tate (2008) when they mention that no-one is excluded from micro-inequities since it means that even employees who are occupying high positions can also be subjected to micro-inequities.

A basic form of rankism which covers maltreatment, humiliation and intimidation is bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Bullying in the workplace has a variety of labels such as psychological harassment, emotional abuse and mobbing (Michelle, 2010). Bullying is characterised by intentional, repeated and enduring aggressive behaviour intended to be hostile or perceived to be hostile by the recipient and is usually unpredictable, irrational and unfair (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). One can believe that bullying behaviour and acts are pre-meditated and consciously planned. Fox and Stallworth (2005) describe bullying as “ill

treatment and hostile behaviour in the workplace which could be subtle or unconscious”. This supports Rowe’s definition of micro-inequities. “Bullying is defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour with the intention to undermine or humiliate the recipient” (Acas, 2005). It can be assumed that the intention of the bully is to hurt the victim.

Michelle (2010) argues that bullied targets are mostly not assertive. Although it is believed that a bully can be anyone in the workplace, most researchers such as Rowe (2008), indicate that the perpetrators are often people in authority (Michelle, 2010). It can be assumed that being a bully may not depend only on the level of authority, since employees may have the potential to bully their colleagues on the same job level as themselves, if they find them not to be assertive like it was argued by (Michelle, 2010). It was further mentioned by Michelle (2010) that bullying is typically targeted towards one or a few selected victims, rather than being a form of a more generalised workplace incivility. The perpetrators decide to target the individuals they find threatening (Sloan, 2010). This could be influenced by the assumptions that the perpetrator have about the potential victims which mean that they are either threatening or non-threatening to them. The difficulty with this assumption is that one could be wrong about the targeted victim, only to find that the individual is actually not threatened but retaliates as a result of the negative treatment.

The bully’s behaviour is meant to intimidate and they disregard the target’s feelings. Sloan (2010:13) states that the bullied victim is often ignored and isolated from the team’s activities. “If the bully is in a position of power they may threaten their victim with job loss” (Namie & Namie, 2000). The preceding statement means that bullies who are line managers can deliberately plan to mistreat their victims. Employers have a duty to protect their employees and create a safe and a healthy work environment and no-one is entitled to threaten other people. “Most bullying incidents occur between individuals especially when there is no shared power” (Suff & Strebler, 2006). It is further indicated that having a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying does not mean that it will be easy to identify the behaviour.

Suff and Strebler (2006:4) state that bullying is not only carried out face-to-face but could also be done by electronic, written communication or by telephone. This indicates that any channel of communication may have the potential to be used as a tool to convey bullying behaviour, which means that organisations should ensure that they effectively manage all channels and are aware of the risks from each one of them. Unfortunately the reality of life is that some people do not care about the feelings of other people. There are people who are power-hungry and they fulfil that need by hurting other people. This is confirmed in the types of bullying as described by Suff & Strebler (2006).

#### **2.5.4.1 Three types of bullying as described by Suff and Strebler (2006)**

- **Predatory bullying:** is demonstrated when the perpetrator is using the victim to prove his power to other people.
- **Dispute-related bullying:** develops as a result of conflict that is not resolved, especially when one person feels that the other has wronged them.
- **Escalating bullying:** can be described by the way people perceive the reasons for their own and other people's behaviour.

Based on the way that these types of bullying are described, they all indicate that bullies think only about themselves. It is evident that predatory bullies might be people in authority or senior to their targets. The fact that their intention is to prove their power to other people raises a concern on what the intrinsic motivation of the bullies could be in this regard. As for dispute resolution, one wonders how the target will respond, since the bully might be accusing them even when they may not be at fault. It is interesting that people could easily turn a situation around and make themselves victims. With regard to the last type of bullying, one could safely conclude that bullies are self-centered. Michelle (2010) listed some of the behaviours associated with bullying in Table 1. It is acknowledged that there may be other forms of behaviour which are not listed in this table.

**Table 1: Typical behaviours of bullies**

- Constant interruptions while other people are talking
- Belittling someone's opinion or contribution
- Deliberate and physical intimidation and ignoring someone or excluding them
- Singling out targets in front of others and shouting at these targets
- Gossiping or spreading rumours and unfair criticism
- Sending hostile emails or correspondences

Source: Michelle (2010).

According to Fox and Stallworth (2005:440), employees who have experienced bullying have less confidence in the ability of their organisation to deal effectively with bullying, particularly when the perpetrators are their supervisors. According to Fox and Stallworth (2005:452), it was found that from a sample of 262 employees who participated in one of their surveys, 97% confirmed that they have experienced bullying in their workplace. Given the high percentage of people believed to have been exposed to bullying as indicated by Fox and Stallworth (2005), it is convincing that almost every employee might have experienced some form of micro-inequities in the workplace, as argued by Chering and Tate (2008).

### **2.5.5 Deviant behaviour**

Deviant behaviour is behaviour that violates the policy rules, organisation's norms, policies or internal rules (Petersen, 2002). Most organisations have policies which support the employee's code of conduct, which in turn supports the organisation's values and norms. Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006:14) state that examples of deviant behaviour from the interpersonal point of view are belittling others, playing pranks on others, acting rudely and arguing. Kusey and Holloway (2009) argue that one of the reasons employees engage in workplace deviance is that the organisations in which they work may be supporting or encouraging such behaviour. This was also mentioned under toxic behaviour by Kusey and Holloway (2009) when they indicated that in toxic organisations toxic employees are rewarded. It could be agreed, to some extent, that some organisations could encourage employees to be deviant for their survival, however the challenge would lie in sustaining

good business in the long term with their clients, since their reputations would be on the line, and also on retaining employees who are actually victims or who do not succumb to this kind of a culture.

According Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006:15), workplace environmental characteristics are a good predictor of workplace violence which is an extreme form of deviance. They further alluded to the fact that even if individuals hold high moral standards, the organisation they work for could influence them to engage in deviant behaviour. They referred to a number of organisational factors which contribute to employee deviance such as job stressors, organisational frustration, lack of control over the work environment and sanctions for violating the rules. Stress and frustration have the potential to push an individual to act or say things which they may end up regretting.

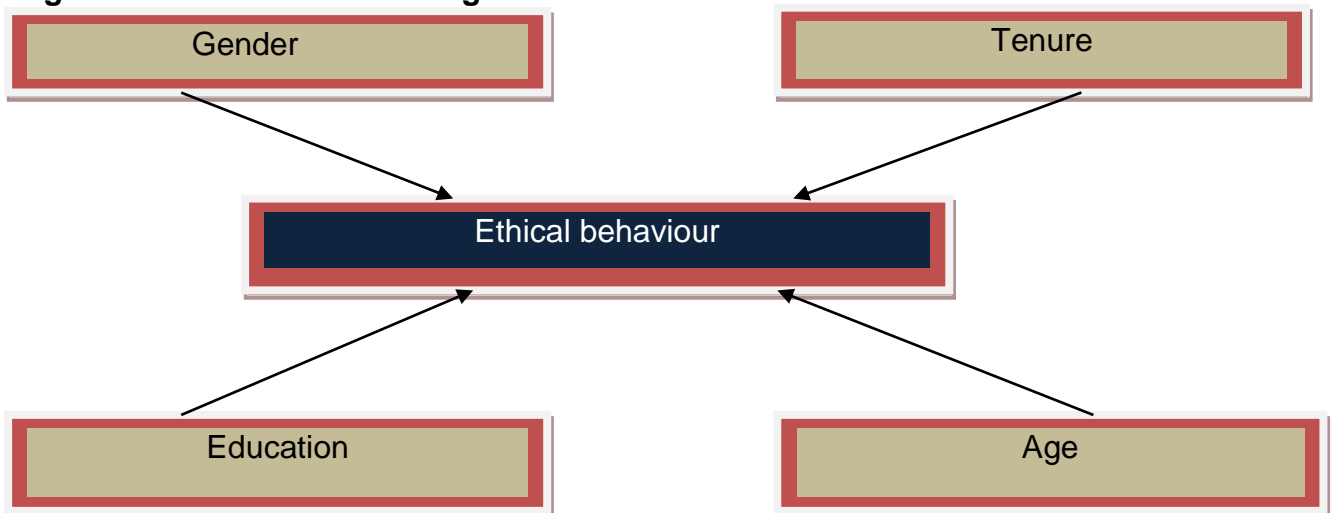
It was also mentioned that individuals could be deviant as a result of the influence of their role models. At times people want to impress those for whom they have high regard, without thinking about the consequences. Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006) are supported by Kusy and Holloway (2009) when they state that a toxic person's behaviour triggers the reactions of others. Those who are the victims could either be bold and retaliate or become scared and do nothing. Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006:4) cited a study which noted that people who tend to spend a lot of time with their friends at work are more likely to engage in deviant activities. Indeed people do influence each other either in a positive or negative way. These settings are often called cliques. The potential of cliques is that individuals are pressurised to behave and act in a particular way in order to fit in or belong.

Peterson (2002:315) mentioned that deviant behaviour may be best predicted based on personality variables and the nature of the situation in the workplace. Indeed situations in the workplace could impact the result of an individual behaving in a particular way. He further stated that wrongful treatment, social normality and the influence of work groups can influence workplace deviance. Most organisations have a code of ethics which guides employee behaviour in line with the organisational culture that the organisation may wish to entrench. The codes usually compel employees to align their personal ethics and values



with those of the organisation. The challenge occurs when the organisational and individual ethics and values are in conflict. Appelbaum, Lacon and Matousek (2007) suggested four elements that can influence ethical behaviour in an organisation which are depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Elements influencing ethical behaviour**



Source: Appelbaum, Lacon and Matousek (2007)

Gender was listed as the first element that can potentially influence ethical behaviour in the workplace. Appelbaum et al. (2007) argue that women are more ethical than men and they are unlikely to conduct themselves in an unethical way. The preceding statement is biased against men and it is not convincing to mention that only men have the potential to be unethical. The three researchers continue to mention that men tend to demonstrate more aggressive behaviour than women. One can argue that people are different irrespective of gender which means there might be women who are even more aggressive than some men, which is contrary to the preceding statement by Appelbaum, Lacon and Matousek (2007).

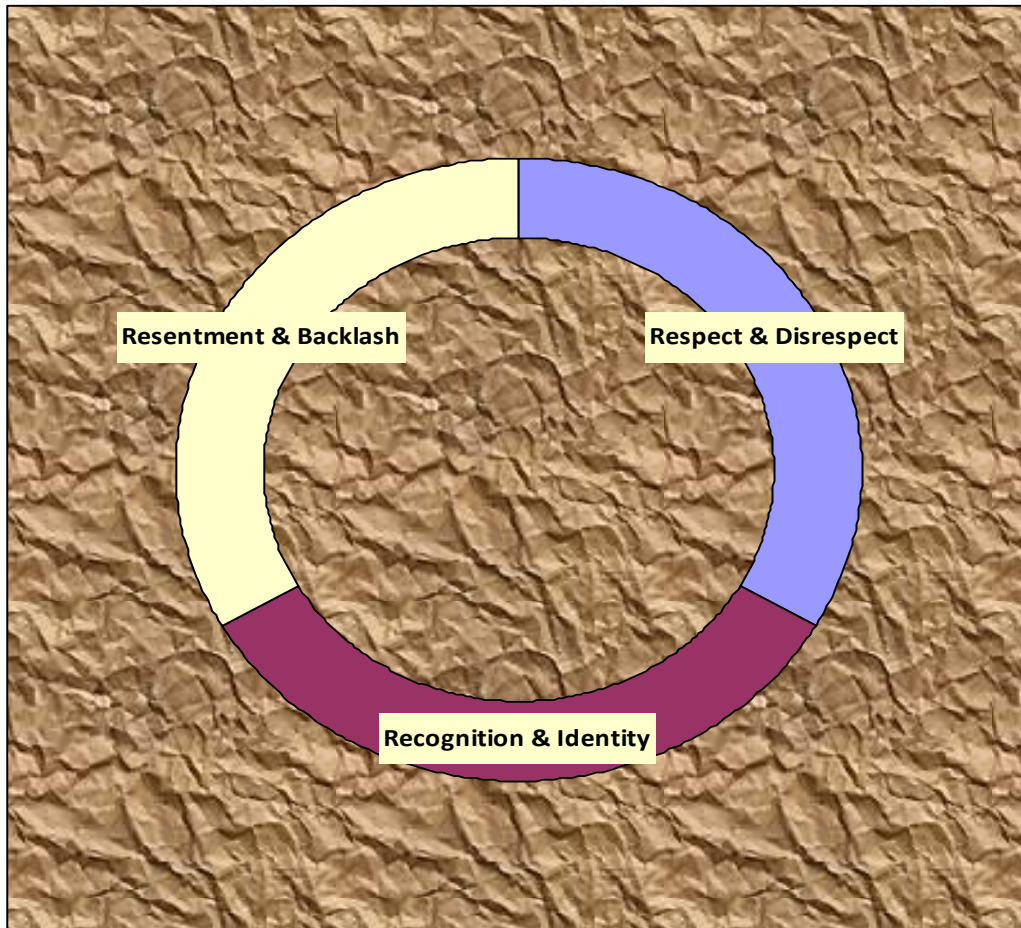
The second element mentioned was tenure. With tenure the researchers argue that employees who have been with the organisation for many years tend to be more ethical than new employees. Unless there are studies which support this argument, the researcher finds it difficult to acknowledge the correlation between the number of years

employed and being ethical. However, one can appreciate that the employees who have been with the organisation for many years understand the impact that unethical conduct would have on what they have worked for many years, as opposed to those who have just joined the organisation.

Education was the third element identified. The argument around this element is that employees who are educated are less unethical, as opposed to those who are not educated (Appelbaum et al., 2007). The preceding statement would only make sense if the argument is based on the level of understanding concepts, policies and business principles by the educated employees as opposed to employees who are not educated. If education is only considered as a status, then there is a concern on whether there is any correlation between unethical behaviour and education unless there is evidence to support the argument. There are various reports and allegations on television and in newspapers across the world reporting accusations against highly educated employees who are alleged to have defied the ethics of their organisations.

The last element identified was age difference. Appelbaum et al., (2007) argue that the older employees are more honest than the young employees. The relationship between age and honesty is questionable unless there are studies which can provide evidence that indeed young people are less honest as compared to older people. It would be advisable to look at the situation and treat people individually since there might be a chance that the arguments by Appelbaum et al., (2007) are not accurate and might be providing a narrow picture. The key message from four elements identified by Appelbaum et al., (2007) is that all employees are different from each other and what influences one employee to act in an ethical way may be different for the next employee. Woods (2010) suggested three dynamics which are believed to cause misunderstandings and conflicts among employees. These dynamics are depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: The dynamics that cause misunderstandings and conflict among different people**



Source: Woods (2010)

Woods (2010) described the three dynamics as follows:

**(i) Respect and Disrespect**

According to Woods (2010:4), disrespect may be overt but it could also be subtle. The researcher further provided a number of remarks that are associated with disrespect as follows:

- 'Not a bad job for a woman'
- 'You do not have to worry about your appointment, you are a minority'
- 'That company is traditional, I am surprised they even hired you'

Woods (2010) argues that the receiver of these remarks may feel offended even though the sender may not be intending to harm them. The researcher further states that when people do not understand the dynamic of respect and disrespect from different perspectives, the conflicts of differences will not end. Respect is one factor that every individual expects from other people. People should just treat others in the same way that they would appreciate to be treated if they were in their position.

## **(ii) Recognition and Identity**

Woods (2010) argues that recognition and identity may have a negative effect, but the offender may also not be intending to harm the receiver. The following remarks were listed:

- “I’m always asked to be in the photo or meet with visitors because I’m one of the few people of color they have. It has got nothing to do with my accomplishments.”
- “I hope you’re not asking me to take the minutes because I’m the only woman in the group.”
- “You’re not like the others. I feel I can talk with you.”
- “Those people”.

Woods (2010) suggests that people should understand that individuals are unique but they also belong to certain groups. They can relate to the aforementioned remarks as they are often made by employees in the workplace. The most prevalent remark is ‘those people’. Most people from all race groups claim not to be aware that this kind of words could be offensive to someone from a different race or group. People find it easy to classify others in ways that suit them, often without thinking of how the other person would interpret the message.

## **(iii) Resentment and Backlash**

The third and last dynamic is resentment and backlash. “Feelings of resentment and backlash tend to be deep-rooted and often go unacknowledged” (Wood, 2010). The main focus of Woods (2010) on this dynamic is that, based on the current political changes in

the world, people who were in the majority in the past, are currently feeling that there is reverse discrimination taking place when the minority group are given opportunities. The authors argue that instead of making progress on diversity, people are embarking on a new phase of hating one another. The unfortunate thing is that all individuals have their own perceptions about things and everyone interprets situations differently. Perhaps if people were to be aware of the effect of the dynamics indicated by Woods (2010), they would learn new ways of relating and treating other people.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The theory explored in this chapter has crafted a broad understanding about micro-inequities. It is evident from the definitions that the actions and behaviours associated with this phenomenon are negative and contrary to what most organisations stand for. Based on the rationale for introducing this phenomenon by Rowe (1990), it is clear that micro-inequities have a potential to damage organisational culture. The exploration of the five classifications of micro-inequities which are micro-messages, interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviours, rankism and deviant behaviour uncovered aspects which are critical to be aware of, in order to build and promote corporate cultures which are inclusive and demonstrate respect towards all employees, irrespective of who they are. It was also interesting and enlightening to learn about some of the factors that influence people to treat others differently. The researcher agrees with the statement made by Woods (2010) which states that self-awareness and awareness about other people is a critical component in diversity. Woods (2010) adds that inclusion is more complex and difficult than inviting people who were previously excluded in. Perhaps what makes inclusion difficult may be the fact that it should be done from the heart and the mind, which touches the foundation of who every individual is and what they believe in.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE IMPACT OF MICRO-INEQUITIES AND EXISTING RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature regarding the impact that micro-inequities have on both employees and organisations. The chapter will further provide existing recommended solutions as suggested by various researchers. If organisations have realized the criticality of managing employee behavior, it means that they should dedicate enough efforts to remove any element that might influence negative behavior.

#### 3.2 The impact of micro-inequities on employees

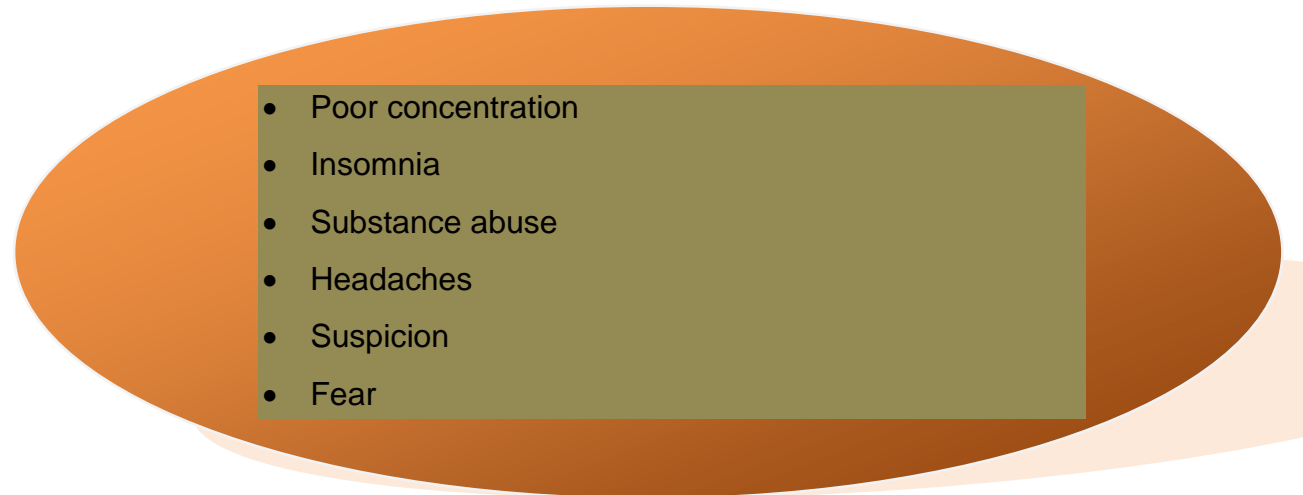
If human resource departments are not addressing issues that create negative work environments, they may continuously lose employees and struggle to recruit more potential talent since the image of the organisations could be tainted. Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) indicate that employees might suffer from changes in blood pressure levels and muscle tension, as a result of negative environments. Obviously, if the health of employees is affected, the sick leave rate would also increase and, as a result, the business goals may not be achieved on time. Employees may also suffer from psychological effects such as impaired judgment, irritability, anxiety, anger, an inability to concentrate and memory loss (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007). These researchers further mention that the effects indicated may not affect the functioning of the victims at work only, but also their personal lives such as their family relations.

The victims of micro-inequities may also experience feelings of despair, low morale, inability to communicate and also suffer from depression (Brett & Stroh, 2003). Micro-messages can cause employees to withdraw and even to be insecure about their own

abilities to perform in their jobs (Young, 2003). One wonders how the families of the victims would react to these situations and also their feelings about the organisations for which their loved ones are working for. It should be frustrating, especially for those individuals who may be experiencing communication problems and depression, which present a serious psychological challenge. Daniel (2010:5) states that micro-inequities could make witnesses or observers worry about whether they will be the next victims. The preceding statement means that micro-inequities do not only affect the victims but also the colleagues who are witnessing the acts and the people related to the victims.

Some of the changes that occur to individuals as a result of the impact of micro-inequities are listed in Figure 3 below by Davenport, Schartz and Elliot (2002).

**Figure 3: Changes experienced by targets of micro-inequities**

- 
- Poor concentration
  - Insomnia
  - Substance abuse
  - Headaches
  - Suspicion
  - Fear

Source: Davenport, Schartz and Elliot (2002).

It is disappointing to learn that an employee may be employed as healthy and normal individual, but end up abusing substances or experiencing health problems such as headaches and insomnia as a result of being a victim of a fellow employee. The researcher questions whether the perpetrators are aware of the extent of emotional and physical damage they are causing. There is no way that employees can be effective and productive if they forget what they are supposed to do at work and are unable to concentrate. It cannot be a good feeling to always be suspicious of other people and to

have constant fear about what someone could do to you. It must be hard for individuals to be exposed to this kind of experiences.

Namie (2000:2) states that the results from a Hostile Workplace Survey indicated that 82% of bullied employees lost their jobs and 38% decided to resign due to being bullied. It is obvious that the reason that these employees lost their jobs could very well be the result of their low performance or not achieving business objectives. Brunner and Costello (2003) argue that the victims who choose not to quit their jobs, may have decreased opportunities for future career advancement, since their self-image and performance has been dented, as well as their emotional and physical wellbeing. The awareness of the impact that micro-inequities have on employees makes the author conclude that employees can be cruel to their colleagues. The researcher acknowledges that there may be further unknown negative experiences as a result of micro-inequities.

### 3.3 The impact of micro-inequities on organisations

Micro-messages can result in high absenteeism rates and turnover ratios (Young, 2003). Brett and Stroh (2003) support Young (2003) by mentioning that micro-inequities could severely decrease the performance of organisations. Other impacts of micro-inequities on organisations listed by Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007) and Daniel (2010) are depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2: The impact of micro-inequities on organisations**

• Reduced productivity
• Difficulty in recruitment and retention of employees
• Reduced corporate image
• Disloyalty to the organisation
• Long-term costs which include health care costs and legal costs

Source: Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) and Daniel (2010).



As indicated by Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007) and Daniel (2010), if the organisation is not productive and the corporate image is also damaged, the customers will be forced to move to competitors. Other stakeholders such as shareholders and partners will also seek reasons for poor organisational performance since the low productivity levels would affect their financials or profit margins. Organisations, especially in the private sector, are aimed at generating profits instead of losing money. Expenses such as time lost in attending court cases and replacement costs as mentioned by Daniel (2010) are some of the unnecessary expenses which any organisation should avoid.

Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007:22), state that companies in the USA alone lose an excess of \$200 billion each year due to employee deviance, another form of micro-inequities which happens when an employee's behaviour is against the policy and values of the organisation. Employee deviance has also been found to be the cause of approximately 30% of all business failures (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007:10). It is evident that micro-inequities may cost organisations a lot of money.

Moynahan (2009:3) summarized some of the tips on what to do and what not to do when dealing with micro-inequities in Table 3. The table indicates different ways that could assist in eliminating micro-inequities in the workplace.

**Table 3: The do's and do not's to eliminating micro-inequities**

Do not	Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignore, dismiss, interrupt or talk over others</li> <li>• Get distracted with multitasking</li> <li>• Critique with nonverbal behavior, like rolling of the eyes or checking ones watch</li> <li>• Let stress undermine relationships</li> <li>• Fail to respond when others seek input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take the time to listen with attention and respect</li> <li>• Seek input and credit people's contributions</li> <li>• Share the floor using inclusive meeting procedures</li> <li>• Use micro-affirmations often</li> </ul>

Source: Moynahan (2009:3).

By referring to the tips indicated in Table 3, one would wonder if it would be possible for individuals to stop some of the actions or behaviour since they may be subconscious of their colleagues. It can be argued that only employees who are concerned about the feelings of their colleagues and who are willing to comply with their organisational policies, would start or continue to implement the tips for eliminating micro-inequities, as suggested by Moynahan (2009).

### **3.4 Recommended solutions on addressing micro-inequities**

Moynahan (2009:3) states that accepting that micro-inequities do exist and that it is important to talk about them is the first step towards addressing the damage they cause. The researcher further recommends that employees should be taught to use valuing behaviour or micro-affirmations as named by Rowe (2008). Rowe (2008) suggests the reinforcing of good behaviour; commending and rewarding actions that are helpful. However one needs to acknowledge the possibility that some employees may not be attracted by the rewards, but still continue to ill-treat their colleagues. Suff and Strebler (2006) suggest that organisations should have practical dignity policies which promote positive and respectful behaviour. The rewards and consequences for non-compliance should be made known to all employees from the time they join the organisation and also on a regular basis as a reminder with the aim of embedding good conduct.

Rowe (2008) suggests that the topic of micro-inequities should be included in employee attitude surveys, company newsletters, staff meetings and in management training programs. Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006) recommend that all employees should adopt a particular mindset that is comprised of organisation's ethical values and codes of conduct. The two authors further suggest a thorough background check when hiring new employees. The question with regard to the preceding recommendation is about how organisations are going to find credible information or evidence that proves that a potential employee has always demonstrated either positive or negative behavior towards their colleagues since some people often choose the people that they have good relationships with as their references when applying for jobs.

Kusey and Holloway (2009) recommend that organisations should address the system as a whole in order to eradicate toxic behaviours. Addressing the system may include assessing the current culture, in order to determine the symptoms and causes of micro-inequities and the extent of their prevalence in the organisation. Toxic employees should be approached individually in order to challenge their bad behaviour (Kusey & Holloway, 2009). The latter suggestion was also supported by Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007). Certain issues are better managed by dealing directly with the people involved and the preceding recommendation might be just one of the appropriate solutions to remove micro-inequities.

Young (2003) also suggests company-wide educational initiatives that focus on the impact of micro-messages on individuals, team dynamics and organisational culture. Educational initiatives could be a powerful tool, as long as they are managed and monitored consistently and the results are measurable in order to ensure their effectiveness. Fiofiori et al., (2007) recommend that organisations should engage all employees across all boundaries and encourage them to value differences. The researcher believes that the valuing of diversity which is demonstrated by understanding, accepting and respecting people who are different should be the starting point for eliminating and preventing micro-inequities in the workplace. The recommendations listed in this section are regarded as solutions to managing micro-inequities in organisations.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident that micro-inequities have a damaging impact on both organisations and employees, which justifies the importance for organisations to pay serious attention to this phenomenon. The fact that the victims of micro-inequities can experience depression, have physical illnesses such as headaches, and end up abusing substances, indicates that micro-inequities are bad to both individuals and organisations. The negative impact of poor performance and bad image for the organisation are severe and surely no organisation can afford to be in this state. One could conclude by mentioning that the way people relate to each other is critical for the wellbeing

and functioning of employees and the effectiveness of organisations. Most of all recommendations provided by various researchers such as Rowe (2008), Kusey & Holloway (2009) and Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007) are found to be practical, particularly where the main focus is on the awareness of micro-inequities and the creation of positive corporate culture. Any organisation that wishes to be the employer of choice and retain good talent should discourage and combat any form of micro-inequities in the workplace.

### **3.5.1 Focus of the study**

It is evident from the literature that there is a growing interest on negative behaviours that is affecting employees and organisations which are in line with the concept of micro-inequities. Although, as previously mentioned in chapter one of this study, academic interest in this phenomenon in South Africa is still limited. Therefore the focus of this study is on the nature and the implications of the concept of micro-inequities at a South African company.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the overall description of the research design used in this study. The methods used in this study to select participants and for data collection will also be discussed in detail. The chapter will also cover the way in which data was analysed. The last part of this chapter will discuss how the research ethics were observed by the author throughout the process of the study.

#### 4.2 Research design

Research designs are the structured procedures used for a study which should always comprise of three building blocks namely, research philosophy, strategy of inquiry and a research method (Creswell, 2009). The researcher's skills and research practices play a critical part in selecting a research design (Maree, 2010). The selection of the research design in this study was also guided by the fact that it should be an effective method of exploring the nature and extent of micro-inequities. An appropriate research method should be carefully selected in order to fulfil the objectives of a research study, which means that thorough understanding of different designs is significant.

##### 4.2.1 Classification of the research design

The research design of the proposed study will be described as follows:

- **Empirical research:** this study is empirical since the data was collected from five females and three male participants.

- **Primary data:** primary data was used to address the research objectives.
- **Basic research:** this study was conducted to understand the experience of participants with regard to the concept of micro-inequities, which makes the study one of basic research.
- **Descriptive:** descriptive research indicates the detailed profile of the participants and the situation under study (Saunders et al., 2009). The study will provide a detailed description of the participants and their experiences they were subjected to in relation to micro-inequities.
- **Cross-sectional research:** this study followed a cross-sectional approach, since the collected data was for a particular time when participants experienced micro-inequities.
- **Qualitative data:** according to Saunders et al., (2009), qualitative data is non-numeric. The technique used in collecting data in this study was non-numeric and was conducted through face-to-face individual interviews.

### 4.3 Research philosophy

Social constructivist worldview philosophy provided guidance for this study. Within this philosophy individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed towards certain objects or things (Creswell, 2009). Since micro-inequities are formed by interactions between people and their experiences, social constructivism was found to be the most suitable philosophy for this study. The researcher relied on the views that participants had about micro-inequities as suggested by Creswell (2009). This philosophy allows participants to share their perceptions about micro-inequities and also describe the meaning of their experiences in relation to the phenomenon. According to Saunders et al., (2009:111), social constructivists view reality as being socially constructed. This philosophy has provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the experiences that employees endure in the work place in relation to micro-inequities. The researcher was able to develop meaning for the different views pertaining to micro-inequities, as shared by the selected participants during the data collection stage.

#### 4.4 Strategy of inquiry

The strategy of inquiry selected for this study is Grounded theory. Grounded theory is theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The two authors further indicate that grounded theory is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. There are four steps involved for the generation of grounded theory, which are data collection, data analysis, theory delimitation and theory definition as indicated by Maree (2010). According to Saunders et al., (2009:149) data collection in a grounded theory strategy begins in the absence of an initial theoretical framework which was also suggested by Maree (2010).

#### 4.5 Research method

A qualitative research method was used in this study. A qualitative research approach is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Since the author was aiming to understand the meaning of micro-inequities from the participant's perspective, a qualitative research method was found to be the most appropriate method for this study. This method has enabled the researcher to verify the assumptions from existing studies such as arguments which claim that micro-inequities exist in all organisations.

Creswell (2009) indicates that qualitative research is known for using words. The process of research involves emerging questions during data collection and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data as the process unfolds (Creswell, 2009). Leedy (2010) emphasizes the fact that a qualitative method continues to evolve during the course of the research. Qualitative methods are flexible which allows the study to be adjusted as the process continues (Maree, 2010).

#### **4.5.1 Other characteristics of qualitative research methods as described by Creswell (2009) and Maree (2010)**

- “researchers collect data at the site where participants are experiencing the issue under study”;
- “the focus of the research process is based on the meaning that participants attach to the phenomenon under study and not the meaning that the researcher holds”;
- “multiple sources are used to collect data such as individual interviews, focus groups, observations and reading documents”;
- “researchers play a critical role in the study since they actively collect data from participants”;
- “qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes as the data collection process unfolds”;
- “reliability and validity are critical aspects in qualitative research which should ensure that the research is credible and trustworthy”;
- “qualitative researchers interpret what they see, hear and understand while collecting the data which may be influenced by their own past experiences and understanding”.

A number of sequential steps which included elements such as research settings, the role of the researcher, sampling method, data collection, data recording and analysis were considered as follows:

#### **4.5.2 The role of the researcher**

Qualitative research methods acknowledge the researcher as the research instrument (Maree, 2010). The researcher played an active role throughout the process of the study, from requesting access from the organisation, conducting all the face-to-face interviews and lastly in analysing the data. Although the subject of the study is close to the author’s heart, and since the researcher could also relate to certain dynamics as presented by the literature reviewed, the author worked very hard to ensure that her bias and experience did not influence the data collection process and the perceptions of participants.



### 4.5.3 Sampling method

According to Terre Blanche et al., (2006), sampling is the selection of participants from an entire population. “For any sampling to be considered as scientific, much attention should be focused on the type of elements to be selected and how they are selected (Terre Blanche et al., 2006)”. The aim of sampling within a qualitative research method is to purposefully select participants that will assist the researcher in understanding the research problem and research objectives” (Creswell, 2009). A non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants. Non-probability methods do not make use of a random selection of a population element (Maree, 2010). When applying a non-probability technique, sampling units of analysis in the population do not all have an equal chance of being included in the sample (Fox & Bayat, 2007). Saunders et al., (2009) mentioned that non-probability techniques are suitable for qualitative studies, especially when using interviews for data collection.

A purposive sampling was further applied in order to focus on key themes as presented by participants during the data-gathering process. With purposive sampling participants are selected based on the assumption that they possess data required for the research (Maree, 2010). The researcher selected eight participants from a global organisation based in Johannesburg (South Africa). The participants selected were on middle and junior management levels. Since a non-probability sampling technique allows the researcher to use his/her own discretion when selecting the sample, the researcher made use of the organisation’s manpower report to select the participants. As the study is about personal experiences of being victims of micro-inequities, the researcher acknowledged that not every individual may be willing to open up and disclose their personal experiences, unless they were familiar with the researcher. The selected participants were therefore only individuals who were familiar with the researcher.

A critical case sampling was then applied with the focus of understanding what might have happened to each participant with regard to micro-inequities. This technique was aimed at providing answers on whether all participants had been subjected to micro-inequities or

not, and also their different experiences at work in relation to micro-inequities. Participants were willing to participate in the study after a short briefing on the nature and aims of study and the clarification of the concept of micro-inequities by the author. Table 4 indicates the representation profile of participants.

**Table 4: Representation profile of participants**

Participant Number	Race	Gender	Job Level
1	Black	Female	Middle Management Level
2	Black	Female	Junior Level
3	Black	Male	Junior Level
4	White	Female	Middle Management Level
5	White	Male	Middle Management Level
6	Coloured	Male	Middle Management Level
7	Black	Female	Junior Level
8	Indian	Female	Middle Management Level

#### 4.6 Data collection method

According to Creswell (2009:178), the data collection step includes setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured techniques and establishing protocol for recording information. After thorough analysis of the three research objectives in this study, a semi-structured one-on-one face-to-face interview technique was found to be the most suitable method for collecting data. According to Maree (2010:87) an interview is a two way conversation between the person who is asking questions and the respondent. Charmaz (2006) asserted that semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with an understanding of unique experiences and perceptions of all

participants regarding the phenomenon guiding the study. Since the study was exploratory, the interviews provided more detailed information from participants, as the author had the opportunity to probe and introduce follow-up questions immediately as suggested by Maree (2010).

Creswell (2009:179) mentions that qualitative interviews assist the researcher to see the world through the eyes of the participant in relation to the phenomenon under study. Interviews allow participants to provide current and past information of their experiences. The advantage is that any possible questions from participants will be attended to immediately since the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The other advantage as indicated by Creswell (2009) is that the researcher has control over the line of questioning which will discourage participants from deviating from the research objectives. This technique allowed the author to use a predetermined list of questions which was aligned to the research objectives. The list comprised of ten questions as indicated in Appendix A. Although the author tried to stick to the sequence of the questions as per the list, the flow of the conversation informed the questions to follow and the probing thereof. Grounded theory interviews are specific and focus on filling the theoretical gaps (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher made sure that the conversations were never off-track.

The interviews were very effective in allowing the author to ask participants open-ended questions that provided more detailed information about their experiences pertaining to micro-inequities. The participants shared their experiences from their level of comfort. They were asked to complete the consent forms prior to continuing with the interview as part of ensuring that research ethics are adhered to. All interviews were conducted at the Head Office premises in Johannesburg which was very convenient to both the author and the participants, as they were all employed by the same organisation at that time. As the topic for the study is sensitive, the author found it critical to build rapport and trust with the participants prior to data-gathering. The participants were briefed individually before the actual dates of the interviews in order to explain the purpose of the study and the phenomenon (micro-inequities). This was done with the aims of ensuring that participants

could clearly understand the purpose of the study, to answer any possible questions and also to explain the entire process of the study.

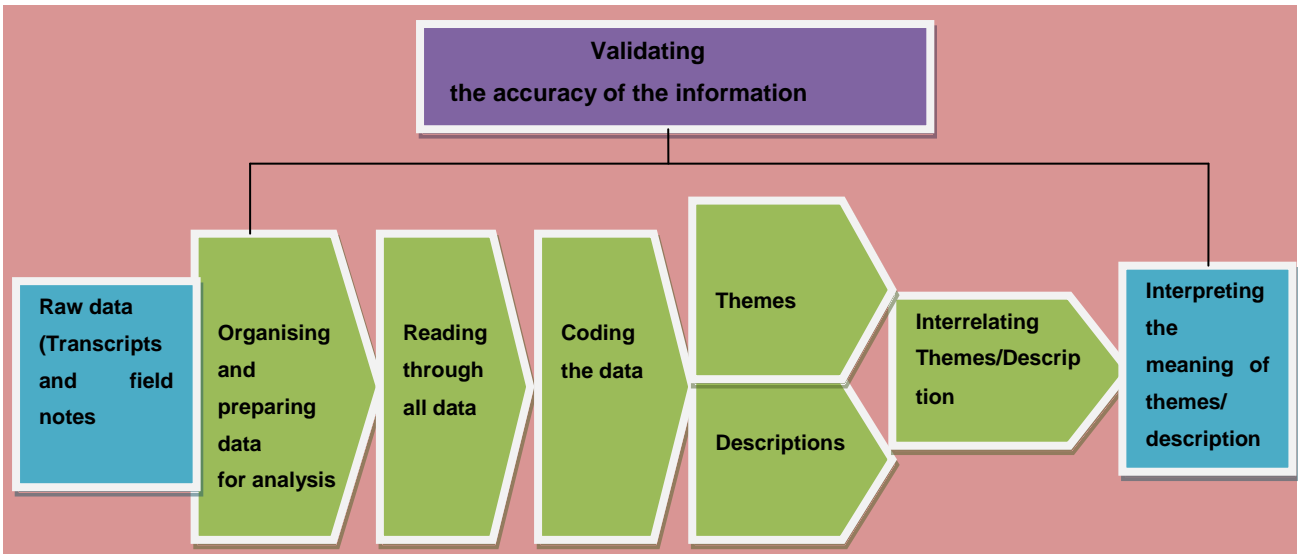
The interview sessions were scheduled based on the availability of participants, and were approximately one hour for each participant. Two recording techniques, as suggested by Saunders et al., (2009) were employed in all interviews, namely audio-recording the interview conversations and taking notes. The participants were advised that a recording tool was to be used and they then confirmed that they were comfortable with the recording as the intention and the protection of their privacy were confirmed and assured by the author.

#### **4.7 Data analysis method**

Qualitative data refers to all non-numeric data (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, the data was in the form of words only. Maree (2010:99), states that qualitative data analysis is based on an interpretive philosophy with the aim of examining meaningful and symbolic content of data. The interpretation of the meaning of micro-inequities by participants, the way they feel about this phenomenon and their perceptions were critical in this study. Since interviews were employed to gather data, content analysis approach was then used during the data analyses as suggested by Maree (2010). This method was found to be relevant to this study as the author was exploring the live experiences of employees in relation to micro-inequities. The author transcribed the entire audio recording in order to prepare the data for analysis. Creswell (2009) emphasises the fact that qualitative data analysis starts during the data collection stage. Maree (2010) argues that the application of an inductive analysis is likely to increase the research findings in a qualitative study. An inductive approach was therefore applied in this study.

The analysis of data in a grounded theory study involves a series of steps as illustrated by Creswell (2009) in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Data analysis in Qualitative Research**



Source: Creswell (2009)

The data analysis steps indicated in Figure 4, were applied by the researcher in this study and are briefly discussed as follows:

#### **4.7.1 Organising and preparing data for analysis**

The raw data was organised and prepared from the transcribed notes and the audio recording which were collected during the interviews. The audio recording was thoroughly observed several times to ensure that the researcher did not omit any important data.

#### **4.7.2 Reading through all data**

All the data from the field notes was read thoroughly, which enabled the researcher to distinguish the data that was either relevant or not relevant to the objectives of the study.

### **4.7.3 Coding the data**

Coding is the process of thoroughly reading the transcribed data and organising it into meaningful categories (Maree, 2010). The data collected during the interviews was then categorised into themes in line with the research objectives.

#### **4.7.3.1 Open coding**

Open coding was applied in the data analysis process. The researcher used a chart which listed all the open codes identified from the data.

The following coding tips were observed as mentioned by Charmaz (2006):

- Remain open
- Stay close to data
- Keep your codes simple and precise
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Move quickly through data

#### **4.7.3.2 Axial coding**

In axial coding, data is organised in new ways with the aim of making connections between categories of data (Maree, 2010). In analysing the data in this study, the author applied axial coding by connecting the open codes into broad themes.

#### **4.7.3.3 Selective coding**

Utilising selective coding includes the process of selecting and identifying the core categories and systematically relating it to other categories (Maree, 2010). The researcher identified selective coding themes which provided direction to the discussion of the findings namely, confirming the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation, types of

micro-inequities in the organisation, the impact that micro-inequities had on the participants, the actions they took after the incidents and the organisational interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities.

#### **4.7.4. Interpreting the meaning of themes/descriptions**

The final part of the analysis includes the interpretation of the phenomenon under research as seen through the eyes of the participants who were subjected to various forms of micro-inequities. Charmaz (2006) asserts that within a social constructivist philosophy, the author's thoughts are reflected in the data analysis. The analysed data was then compared with the reviewed literature. The conclusions were drawn in line with the research objectives, together with the interpretation of the data in relation to micro-inequities as emphasised by Creswell (2009).

#### **4.8 Demonstration of trustworthiness in the study**

Trustworthiness plays a critical role in qualitative studies, which should be demonstrated throughout the study, including during data analysis, findings of the study and in drawing conclusions (Maree, 2010).

The following aspects as indicated by Maree (2010) were utilised by the researcher in this study:

- **Using multiple data sources:** the information from the reviewed literature together with data collected from participants in the study were utilized.
- **Documenting the analyses process:** the process of analyses was documented in order to allow other people to understand the factors that informed the author to arrive at the interpretation of the data collected.

- **Controlling for bias:** Although it was difficult to be absolutely objective, the researcher endeavoured to ensure that personal views, feelings and expectations did not influence the study and its results.
- **Verifying raw data:** After the data was transcribed, the researcher had informal conversations with participants with the aim of verifying whether the understanding and interpretation of their responses are accurate, as suggested by Maree (2010).
- **Avoiding generalisation:** Since qualitative research methods do not generalise the findings of the study, the researcher made sure that each participant's experience and views were treated as unique.
- **Verifying and validating the findings:** According to Maree (2010:114), verification and validation of findings can be obtained by providing the participants with copies of the draft report and requesting them to make either oral or written comments to ensure that the information presented is accurate. The researcher shared the findings of the study with each participant in order to verify and validate the accuracy of the data collected.

#### 4.9 Pilot testing

Prior to conducting the main data collection, the author conducted a pilot study with two participants, which was aimed at testing the validity of the interviews as a suitable technique for data collection, and also to test if the questions were relevant and suitable to address the research objectives. According to the researcher, the piloted questions were appropriate and the interview technique seemed to be the suitable method for data collection.



## 4.10 Research ethics

The main purpose of research ethics is to protect the people participating in any form of research, which should also ensure the credibility of the research (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Research ethics are to be taken into consideration from the planning of the research, during the requesting of access to the organisation in which the study will be conducted, when getting participants to participate in the study, when collecting and analysing data and on compiling a research report (Saunders et al., 2009).

### 4.10.1 The ethics observed in the study

The researcher observed ethics throughout all the stages of the study as follows:

- **Negotiating access**

The researcher submitted an access authorisation request letter to the employer who is represented by the Country Head of Human Resources of the global organisation in Johannesburg where the study was conducted. Access was therefore granted. The letter indicated the purpose of the study and type of access required, as well as how the organisation and participants would benefit from the study.

- **Confidentiality and anonymity**

The researcher assured participants that the protection of their privacy is guaranteed which was also confirmed on the consent forms. The identity of and information provided by participants have been treated as highly confidential.

- **Ethical issues in data collection**

Participants have the right to participate or withdraw from the study at any time (Saunders et al., 2009). The purpose of the study was explained for the second time to

the participants at the beginning of the interviews. All participants received informed consent forms which were also explained to them regarding their rights to volunteer, to participate or not to participate in the study and the assurance of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity. The data collection sessions only resumed once the consent forms were signed by participants. To ensure that operational activities were not disturbed, the sessions were conducted at the organisation's premises during the time that mostly suited the participants, in order to ensure that they did not leave their actual work responsibilities. The author created a comfortable environment for participants during the interviews. The author also assured the participants that they would be protected through-out, and that any sensitive information would be treated with great care and would not be used to harm them in any way. The author continued to be objective in order to ensure that own personal experiences and views would not influence the thoughts of participants and their responses.

- **Ethical issues in data analysis and interpretation**

The author was objective and not biased during the analyses and interpretation of data. All data pertaining to the study will be stored for a maximum period of five years. The data will be stored by the Department of Human Resource Management of the University of Pretoria.



## CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the data analysis process and the results of the study. The interpretation of the meaning of micro-inequities by participants, the way they feel about this phenomenon and their perceptions are critical in this study. The structure of this chapter includes the information about participants, the questions used during the interviews, the description of the coding process and the results thereof.

### 5.2 Sample

Face to face, semi-structured interviews were used as the suitable method to collect the data. Eight participants were interviewed. All interviews were recorded, which assisted the author during the transcription as the recordings were played several times to ensure that accurate information is covered. The demographic information of the eight participants is provided in Table 5.

**Table 5: Demographic information of participants**

Participant Number	Race	Gender	Job Level
1	Black	Female	Middle Management Level
2	Black	Female	Junior Level
3	Black	Male	Junior Level
4	White	Female	Middle Management Level
5	White	Male	Middle Management Level
6	Coloured	Male	Middle Management Level
7	Black	Female	Junior Level
8	Indian	Female	Middle Management Level

Table 5 indicates that the majority of the participants are Black females, with an equal representativeness from the rest in terms of White males and females, Black males, Coloured males and Indian females. Overall total is five females and three males.

### 5.3 Interview questions

The interview questions were mostly open ended. All the questions were in line with the research objectives. The outline of the interview questions is provided in Table 6.

**Table 6: Research objectives and interview questions**

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED	FURTHER QUESTIONING
<b>1. To investigate the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Do micro-inequities exist in this organisation?</li> <li>- If the answer is yes, why do you think micro-inequities exist in this organisation?</li> </ul>	-Why do you think micro-inequities exist in this organisation?
<b>2. To determine the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of micro-inequities have you experienced?</li> <li>-Have you ever witnessed anyone being subjected to micro-inequities?</li> <li>- Has anyone ever confided in you regarding their experiences as victims of micro-inequities, if yes what happened to that person?</li> <li>- What do you think could have motivated the perpetrator to act or behave in that manner?</li> </ul>	-If the answer is yes, can you share what exactly happened?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED	FURTHER QUESTIONING
<p><b>3. To determine the impact of micro-inequities on employees</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did you feel after the incident?</li> <li>- What did you do about the incident?</li> <li>- What did your colleagues do about the incident?</li> <li>- What kind of impact did the experience have on you?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What was your reaction to the perpetrator?</li> <li>-Did your experience change your relationship with the perpetrator?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. To establish the organisation's support measures, processes and interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What supports measures and processes are available for victims of micro-inequities in the organisation?</li> <li>-What interventions does the organisation have in place in order to discourage and prevent micro-inequities?</li> <li>-Which interventions would you recommend for the organisation in order to prevent and address issues related to micro-inequities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Is everyone in the organisation aware of the process to follow in case they are victims?</li> <li>- Do employees utilize the existing processes and support measures?</li> <li>- What else do you suggest that the organisation should do to remove and prevent micro-inequities?</li> </ul>

The interview questions were linked to the four research objectives which are the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation, the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation, the impact of micro-inequities on the participants and the actions they took after the incidents and the interventions implemented by the organisation with the aim of addressing micro-inequities. The interview questions were 10 in total with an addition of follow-up questions.

## 5.4 Data analysis

The data was collected using semi-structured face to face interviews which were recorded with an audio tape. The data was later transcribed and prepared for analysis as indicated in Chapter 4 under the discussion of data analysis method. The transcribed data was used to highlight key themes on a chart during the coding process which provided a number of categories. Table 7 indicates the coding process that was followed in the study.

**Table 7: Coding process**

Research objectives	Interview question asked	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. To investigate the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation	Do micro-inequities exist in this organisation?	-Yes I actually think they exist -I am convinced they exist -Definitely they exist -Yes I do think they exist	Do micro-inequities exist in this organisation?	<b>CONFIRMING THE EXISTENCE OF MICRO-INEQUITIES IN THE ORGANISATION</b>
	I the answer is yes, why do you think micro-inequities exist in this organisation?	-I have witnessed -My own experience -Employee opinion survey results -Told by other colleagues	The reasons to substantiate the participants' responses in relation to the existence of micro-inequities	
2. To determine the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation	What kind of micro-inequities have you experienced?	-Views not recognized -Not getting support -Shouting -Malicious rumours -Gossips -Threatened -Abuse -Excluded -Devalued -Bullied	What kind of micro-inequities have you experienced?	<b>TYPES OF MICRO-INEQUITIES IN THE ORGANISATION</b>

Research objectives	Interview question asked	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
	Have you ever witnessed anyone being subjected to micro-inequities? If the answer is yes what happened to that person?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bullying</li> <li>- Abuse</li> </ul>	Witnessing other victims	
	Has anyone ever confided in you regarding their experiences as victims of micro-inequities; if the answer is yes what happened to that person?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Insulted</li> <li>-Efforts not recognized</li> <li>-Continuously attacked</li> <li>-Sidelined for promotion</li> </ul>	Feedback from other victims	
	What do you think could have motivated the perpetrator to act or behave in that manner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Personality</li> <li>-Intimidated</li> <li>-To gain favour</li> <li>-Under work pressure</li> <li>-Part of culture</li> <li>-Favouritism</li> <li>-Insecurity</li> <li>-Self-blame</li> <li>-I do not know</li> <li>-Jealousy</li> <li>-Envy</li> </ul>	The perceived causes for the negative behaviour of perpetrators	
<b>3. To determine the impact of micro-inequities on employees</b>	How did you feel after the incident?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Angry</li> <li>-Rejected</li> <li>-Disrespe-cted</li> <li>-I did not care</li> <li>-Offended</li> <li>-Sad</li> <li>-Worthless</li> <li>-Stressed</li> <li>-Disappointed</li> <li>-Lost confidence</li> <li>-Humiliated</li> </ul>	Emotional state of participants after the incidents	<b>THE IMPACT OF MICRO-INEQUITIES ON THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE ACTIONS THEY TOOK AFTER THE INCIDENTS</b>
	What did you do about that incident?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Did not do anything</li> <li>-Confronted the perpetrator/s</li> <li>-Reported incidents</li> <li>-Did not report</li> <li>-Kept quite</li> <li>-Resigned</li> <li>-Bottle-up feelings</li> <li>-Did nothing</li> <li>-Share the experiences</li> </ul>	Actions taken by participants after the incidents	

Research objectives	Interview question asked	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
	What did your colleague/s do about the incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Resigned</li> <li>-Bottle-up feelings</li> <li>-Did nothing</li> <li>-Share the experiences</li> </ul>	Actions by other colleagues who were subjected to micro-inequities	
	What kind of impact did the experience have on you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-It brought an element of arrogance</li> <li>-Nothing changed</li> <li>-Demotivated</li> <li>-Low morale</li> </ul>	Behaviour of participants after the incidents	
<b>4. To establish the organisation's support measures, processes and interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities</b>	What support measures and processes are available for victims of micro-inequities in the organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The Human Resource Department</li> <li>-ICAS</li> <li>-Diversity &amp; Inclusion sessions</li> <li>-Code of conduct of the organisation</li> <li>-Disciplinary process</li> <li>-I don't know</li> <li>-Employee help-line</li> <li>-Mentoring program</li> </ul>	What support measures and processes are available for victims of micro-inequities in the organisation?	<b>ORGANISATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT MANAGING MICRO-INEQUITIES</b>
	What interventions does the organisation have in place in order to discourage and prevent micro-inequities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No interventions</li> <li>-Harassment session</li> <li>-Employee opinion survey</li> <li>-Diversity and inclusion sessions</li> <li>-I do not know</li> </ul>	What interventions does the organisation have in place in order to discourage and prevent micro-inequities	
	Which interventions would you recommend for the organisation in order to prevent and address issues related to micro-inequities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-A transparent approach in managing micro-inequities</li> <li>-Initiatives led by management</li> <li>-Awareness sessions about micro-inequities</li> <li>-Improve leadership skills</li> <li>-Encourage reporting</li> <li>-Consistent disciplinary</li> <li>-Protect victims</li> <li>-Anonymous box for complaints</li> </ul>	Which interventions would you recommend for the organisation in order to prevent and address issues related to micro-inequities	

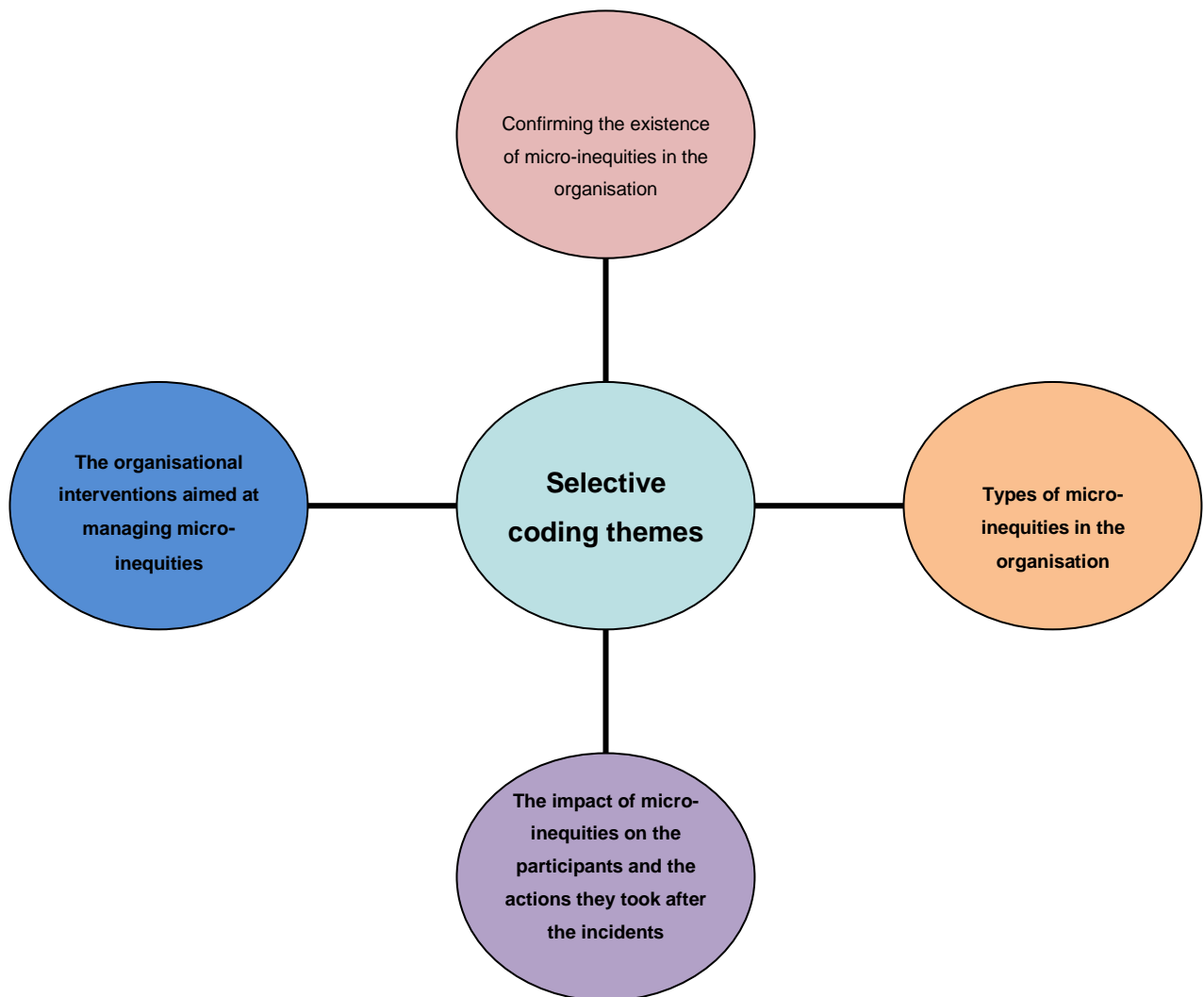


Table 7 provided an outline of the coding process which included selective coding, axial coding and open coding themes identified from the data of the study. The coding process is aligned with the research objectives and interview questions.

## 5.5 Results

The four selective coding themes identified from the data analysis process, and informed by the four research objectives of the study, are depicted in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Selective coding themes**



The responses of the participants will be presented in the next section. The responses will be indicated in line with the four selective coding themes connected to the four research objectives.

### **5.5.1 Confirming the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation**

Within this selective coding theme, two axial codes were identified, namely the existence of micro-inequities and the reasons to substantiate the participants' responses in relation to the existence of micro-inequities.

#### **5.5.1.1 The existence of micro-inequities**

This axial coding theme indicates the responses of participants with regards to the existences of micro-inequities in the organisation. Based on participants' responses, it was evident that all eight participants believe that micro-inequities do exist in the organisation.

Some of the open codes identified were as follows: 'yes I actually think they exist, definitely they exist, I am convinced they exist and yes I do think they exist'

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1: 'yes, I actually think they exist'*

*Participant no 2: 'yes, they do exist'*

*Participant no 3: 'I think they do exist'*

*Participant no 4 'yes they exist'*

*Participant no 5: 'I am convinced they exist'*

*Participant no 6: 'definitely they exist'*

*Participant no 7: 'yes I do think they exist'*

*Participant no 8: 'yes, yes definitely, I think they exist'*

### **5.5.1.2 The reasons to substantiate participants' responses in relation to the existence of micro-inequities**

This axial coding theme provides supporting information to the responses made on the preceding axial coding theme. The responses were confirmed with brief statements which included participant's experiences with regard to micro-inequities, their observations of incidents and feedback from colleagues who have been subjected to micro-inequities.

The open-codes identifies are: I have witnessed, my own experience, employee opinion survey results and told by other colleagues.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'I actually think they exist and if one were to recall or just reflect especially in areas where I have witnessed an incident related to micro-inequities'

*Participant no 2:* 'Well, we are working with different people from all works of life with different intentions, so yes they exist'

*Participant no 3:* 'By nature of my position in the Human Resource Department, I get people coming through and even though they may not be necessarily formally reporting such cases but they talk about what they are experiencing, you find that there is some level of micro-in-equities that exist'

*Participant no 4:* 'Uh! Because in our employee opinion survey results there is a clear indication on discrimination of people and free to speak your mind indexes are always a concern. Supervisors do not treat their staff with respect'

*Participant no 5:* 'Well, I had a micro-inequity experience when I was working in the Fuels department'

*Participant no 6:* 'Uh! I have heard people talking about some of the toxic behaviours in the organisation and I have also witnessed quite a lot of gossips'

*Participant no 7:* 'Uh! The reason why I think they do exist is going to be based on my own experience within the organisation, I do think they exist'

*Participant no 8:* 'Because it is not always that you are in an environment where you approach people freely and communicate with people freely were you are able to get the respect that you expect because very often you may have the respect for a person and when they respond you realize that they do not actually see you in the same way and that immediately changes your perceptions about them, I experienced micro-inequities'

All eight participants could relate to the concept of micro-inequities and they all highlighted their brief rationale in validating the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation which leads to the next theme, which indicates the responses of participants in line with the types of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation.

## **5.5.2 Types of micro-inequities in the organisation**

Within this selective coding theme, there are four axial codes identified to provide a response on the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation within this theme. The axial coding themes identified are the individual experiences with regard to micro-inequities, witnessing other victims, incidents shared by other victims and the causes for the negative behavior of perpetrators. The responses of all eight participants evoked the need to explore the individual experiences and the types of micro-inequities that each individual has been exposed to.

### **5.5.2.1 The individual experiences with regard to micro-inequities**

This axial coding theme provides a summary of the experiences that the participants have been subjected to. The open codes identified are as follows: views not recognized, not

getting support, shouting, malicious rumours, gossips, threatened, abuse, excluded, devalued and bullied.

### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'There were tendencies where as women our views were not considered in meetings by the MD who would be chairing the meetings. It would be as if our points are not that important, but a male colleague would raise the same issue and it would seem as if it is now a new point and it would be considered'

*Participant no 2:* 'I was not getting support and my colleagues gave me an impression that I was trying to shine as I was new which made them not listen to me in meetings'

*Participant no 2:* 'Like you would find other people being called into lunches or just for a walk but I would be excluded'

*Participant no 2:* The line manager would threaten us by using the name Head of the department to get things done, this made me feel bullied'

*Participant no 2:* 'My colleague was pointing me with his finger and every-time I wanted to say something he would cut me off and also interject me disrespectfully'

*Participant no 2:* 'Well a colleague spread a rumour that I gossiped about someone else in a malicious way, which is not my nature to gossip'

*Participant no 3:* 'Oh! It was an incident which I won't be able to disclose the details to because you would be able to link them. The manner in which the person approached the incident, he was shouting, you know he addressed it in an accusatory manner without necessary getting the facts. Uh! to a point that they were implying that I do not have organisation's interests all heart'

*Participant no 3:* 'A colleague spread a rumour that I was having a relationship with our Head of Department which was malicious'

*Participant no 4:* 'I am just thinking, one of our colleagues who used to work here, he was always mentioning that some of the people are not intelligent enough to attend his team

meetings. He would say that in front of everyone, he didn't say name but he was referring to us the Advisors'

*Participant no 4:* 'For the last two years it just felt like I am not worth to be part of this team Someone said to me that I am not good at what I am doing and I should do something else, without really giving examples of what I am not good at'

*Participant no 5:* 'One line manager would call me and my team incompetent, We never set around the table like this to discuss the issues but it was more about her bashing us. She would threaten us by saying that she has a very good relationship with the GM and she will make sure that my team members get fired'

*Participant no 6:* 'Uh! Last year towards the middle of the year a colleague of mine actually gossiped about me. She actually said I have said something about a certain colleague which was a lie'

*Participant no 6:* 'Another colleague of mine in-front of everybody in a meeting she volunteered to present my work giving an impression that I am not capable of what I should be doing by also mentioning that her data is the most accurate as compared to mine'

*Participant no 6:* 'The previous Procurement Manager would actually exclude me in all her meetings, she wouldn't even greet me, you know, she made it known that I am not part of their team, so when-ever they went for lunches I never got invited, even though I am still part of the Procurement team'

*Participant no: 7:* 'The team lead we appointed for our project would discard our inputs and not consider them to be constructive. He was always trying to impress management and make a mark for himself and take our glory to himself. Even in terms of delegating tasks and duties he would delegate those tasks that he felt are useless and execute those that he knew would put him in the spot light'

*Participant no 7:* 'I was involved in a project which I was working with management. I once forwarded them a report and one manager copied everybody with his queries and

unhappiness about the report without approaching me separately. I don't think that was necessary. It actually devalues the type of work that you have put in,'

*Participant no 8:* 'In one of the meetings were I was a guest, the Manager in that area looked at me and commanded me to take minutes even though he had the person who normally takes minutes'

*Participant no 8:* 'A colleague of mine just turned around and responded in a very rude and abrupt way and said I do not report to you, so I do not see why you need to know my where about'

All the examples mentioned in the above axial code represented the types of micro-inequities confirmed to be prevalent in the organisation.

#### **5.5.2.2 Witnessing other victims**

This axial code reflects the observations which were witnessed by the participants when their colleagues were being subjected to micro-inequities.

The open codes identified are as follows: bullying and abuse.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 2:* 'A colleague who is a Learner in our department is being bullied left, right and center. I advised her that if this people keep on overloading you with more work, and you end up not delivering they will blame you'

*Participant no 3:* 'I have observed some of the incidents and other people have shared their experiences with me. No, actually the incident is specific I will not give you the details'

*Participant no 5:* 'I think my colleague became abusive towards people, abusing my staff and undermined me as the line manager in front of everybody'

*Participant no 7:* ‘Some of my colleagues would over delegate the work that they did not want to do to the Learner since they perceived them to be a waste of time like booking a meeting room’

### **5.5.2.3 Incidents shared by other victims**

This axial code represents the experiences that other victims of micro-inequities have shared with the participants.

The open codes identified are, insulted, efforts not recognized, continuously attacked and sidelined for promotion.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* ‘In fact it would fall under bullying were a colleagues shared with me that the line manager who is part of the senior leadership insulted her. She never reported the incident, she actually mentioned that she felt that she is not going to get support from HR, nothing is going happen, the perpetrator is too powerful’

*Participant no 3:* ‘Some people shared that their efforts are not recognized and rewarded accordingly as compared to their colleagues’

*Participant no 3:* ‘I am not going to be able to give you specific examples, but I can tell you where people are continuously being attacked and they are made to feel as if they are not pulling their weights or they are not delivering in their spaces because of some political agendas that exist in the organisation. Some of them I have observed and some, people have shared their experiences’

*Participant no 4:* ‘In one of the departments, one of the employees who actually left the company, the line manager has continuously blocked her from applying for positions, has treated her in the way that he would tell her conflicting messages. Uh! the people in the



department are fearful of that particular line manager. The line manager was reported to the helpline but due to insufficient evidence nothing happened'

#### **5.5.2.4 The perceived causes for negative behavior of the perpetrators**

Within this axial coding theme, participants have shared their own perceptions with regard to the factors that might have influenced the negative behaviours of the perpetrators to subject their victims to micro-inequities.

The open codes that emerged are as follows: personality, intimidated, to gain favour, under work pressure, part of culture, favouritism, insecurity, self-blame, I do not know, jealousy and envy.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'I think it was the personality of the former Managing Director. 'He was pro-white colleagues and totally against black colleagues'

*Participant no 2:* 'Maybe they were thinking that I was exposing them or they felt intimidated by me'

*Participant 2:* 'She was trying to gain favour or to redeem herself to that manager so that I look bad that's why she lied about me gossiping about the manager'

*Participant no 2:* 'Maybe is because they were under work pressure'

*Participant no 2:* 'I think gossiping has become part of the culture, so when it happens I just don't care'

*Participant no 2:* 'The person who was in charge of the project before I came might have thought that I was attacking him personally when I was pointing the mistakes of the project hence he started pointing fingers at me'

*Participant no 3:* 'Some think the behavior is caused by is favouritism and favouritism stems from differences in colour while some of the favouritism stems from the fact that

victims might have different personalities from the line managers who would be perpetrators'

*Participant no 3:* 'look I can't tell you what prompted that person to behave in that way, I don't think there is any justification to behave in that way'

*Participant no 4:* 'I think sometimes it is because of having insecurities and sometimes it is lack of knowledge of our process and system, and they use their position to dominate'

*Participant no 4:* 'I must have done something probably to upset her'

*Participant no 5:* 'I actually think she was a very bitter person, if you see the conflict that she had with staff and various people Uh! I just don't think she had any form of people skills'

*Participant no 6:* 'I have no idea, I don't know, she is like that, it is her character'

*Participant no 6:* 'Personally, I think she wanted to build an empire, she came in here and she had a mindset of I am the boss'

*Participant no 7:* 'This person just had issues with the Human Resource department so he would target everyone in the department, his behavior was not directed towards me personally'

*Participant no 7:* 'I think for me, he wanted to prove to the leaders that he is there and he is smart. I think he was marketing himself'

*Participant no 8:* 'This person feels insecure, intimidated and afraid of me. She also has jealousy and envy because everybody likes me since I am new in the department'

*Participant no 8:* 'He is a very dominant character. I felt that the reason why he picked on me is that I was the only Indian girl in the room, number two I am the only one that is on early 30s and number three my personality, I am not a loud mouth in meetings'

### **5.5.3 The impact of micro-inequities on the participants and the actions they took after the incidents**

This selective coding theme indicates the impact that micro-inequities had on the participants. The axial coding themes identified under this selective coding theme, are the emotional state of participants after the incidents, actions taken by participants after the incidents, actions by other colleagues who were subjected to micro-inequities and behavior of participants after the incidents.

#### **5.5.3.1 Emotional state of participants after the incidents**

This axial coding indicates the emotional state that participants went through after their experiences. The open coding theme are namely, angry, rejected, disrespected, I did not care, offended, sad, worthless, stressed, disappointed, lost confidence and humiliated.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'I guess I was angry and I was also disappointed'

*Participant no 2:* 'I felt rejected, I felt undermined, I was uncomfortable'

*Participant no 2:* 'I felt disrespected, I felt small, I was shocked, I was hurt'

*Participant no 2:* 'No, I didn't care, but if its work related I would address it'

*Participant no 3:* 'I was not impressed, I was, Uh! I felt offended'

*Participant no 3:* 'I felt disgusted I think at some point it will shorten my stay in the organisation'

*Participant no 4:* 'It felt very sad and at the moment I feel quite de-motivated, Uh! I was crying my eyes out, you know it is not a nice feeling at all, I just want to go away and never come back'

*Participant no 4:* 'Uh! Very sad, I feel totally worthless and not capable of doing anything even when I know that I am capable'

*Participant no 4:* 'I felt angry because you do not say things like that'

*Participant no 4:* 'Emotional, stressed, you should always cautious and it is not a good feeling at all'

*Participant no 5:* 'Logically you lose your confidence. You lose your confidence in more senior management like the confidence of your GM because he is not supporting you'

*Participant no 6:* 'I was angry hey! I was hurt, it was betrayal of a friend ship'

*Participant no 6:* 'I felt like they are not going take me seriously again, you know that they couldn't come to me and ask me for support or information. She made me feel uncomfortable, she made me feel inferior in the meeting. She made me feel like you actually don't know what you are talking about, but she is always like that. A lot of people leave her'

*Participant no 6:* 'I felt like I was nothing there, not even to greet you, not even to raise your hand, she didn't do that'

*Participant no 7:* 'It had a very negative impact on me. I felt disregarded'.

*Participant no 8:* 'I felt belittled, I felt less important to the rest of the team, felt very humiliated and very disappointed'

### **5.5.3.2 Actions taken by participants after the incidents**

This axial coding theme provides the actions that participants took after being subjected to micro-inequities. The responses are presented within two sub-themes namely confronting the perpetrator and reporting incidents.

The open coding themes identified are as follows: did not do anything, confronted the perpetrator/s, resigned, bottle-up feelings, shared the experiences and reported incidents.

### 5.5.3.2.1 Confronting the perpetrator

This axial coding theme indicated whether the participants confronted the perpetrators or not.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'No I didn't do anything. I actually felt that when I was ignored in the meeting, it seemed so subtle, which was going to make it look like I am complaining for nothing'

*Participant no 2:* 'I confronted all the colleagues who were not listening to me at the meeting individually '

*Participant no 2:* 'I asked the colleagues who was pointing fingers at me to meet with me so we can resolve the conflict outside but he refused to meet with me'

*Participant no 2:* 'I just left it without doing anything'

*Participant no 2:* 'I decided to refuse to do anything if when the manager was using the name of the Head of the department to get us do the work'

*Participant no 3:* 'Uh! I kept quiet, I just informed my line manager'

*Participant no 4:* 'No I did not do anything about it. The reason is because you can get into more trouble and be picket on and it would be a worst case for you to go back and challenge'

*Participant no 5:* 'I actually resigned but withdrew after the General Manager asked me to reconsider and retract my resignation letter.'

*Participant no 6:* 'I confronted the colleague who said I gossiped about my other colleague and she denied the allegation'

*Participant no 6:* 'I didn't even argue when my colleague who said that she was going do the presentation I was supposed to do, I just left the meeting room'

*Participant no 6:* 'Seriously, I told all of my colleagues that I have had enough now, I'm probably going to leave as the Procurement Manager was continuously excluding me and everybody said no!, she probably won't stay long'

*Participant no 8:* I did not do anything after my colleague was rude to me, I just told her that if you do not want me to know your where about through the shared calendar its fine'

*Participant no 8:* 'Well you see, because I was in a situation and everybody was stirring at me, I said okay I will take the minutes in the meeting'

#### **5.5.3.2.2 Reporting incidents**

This axial coding theme indicates whether the participants are utilizing formal processes of reporting the incidents and lodging complaints.

The open codes identified are as follows: did not report, kept quiet and escalated to line manager.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 2:* 'I don't think people are reporting incidents, so they keep quite because they are scared that they will be victimized'

*Participant no 2:* 'I did nothing after witnessing a Learner being bullied as I also fought my own battles'

*Participant no 3:* 'For me it was so ridiculous that the gossip did not worth any reaction from me, you know, it's just pure silliness when they said I was having an affair with that person in our department and I didn't do anything about it'

*Participant no 4:* 'Yes in the Human Resource department, we do receive reports from the victims'

*Participant no 4:* 'I just kept quite because I am quite fearful of the management in our department, because as soon as you challenge them, it comes back to you and you can get blamed and be victimized'

*Participant no 5:* 'The General Manager did nothing about the line manager who was insulting me and my team, I believe was in a situation where he was not competent enough to make a proper decision and also very misled by her comments, her management style and the information that she was feeding him. I didn't even report it to the Human Resource Department as I thought I was too matured to address the situation'

*Participant no 6:* I actually escalated it to our line manager'

*Participant no 7:* 'I reported the incident to my line manager'

*Participant no 7:* We gave that Team lead the feedback about his behavior in terms of the way we think and he disregarded that feedback'

*Participant no 8:* 'So I went straight to my boss and I told him that the General Manager commanded me to take the minutes at the meeting'

### **5.5.3.3. Actions by other colleagues who were subjected to micro-inequities**

This sub-title indicates the actions taken by other colleagues who were subjected to micro-inequities.

The open codes identified are resigned, bottle-up feelings, did nothing and share their experiences.

### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1: 'The individual who felt that the line manager was blocking her career progression decided to resign'*

*Participant no 2: 'People bottle up their feelings and I know I am one of them, I come to work but I just shut down'*

*Participant no 2: 'The new learner did nothing when people were continuously giving her more work, I can still see that she is scared to confront them. I also fought my own battles hence I did not intervene'*

*Participant no 3: 'By nature of my position as the Employee Relations Manager, I get people coming through and even though they may not be necessarily formally reporting such cases, but they talk about what they are experiencing'*

*Participant no 5: 'Some people unfortunately just resigned, they were not prepared to work for the line manager who was insulting them, I mean one lady's husband phoned and said you will never speak to my wife like that again, she is not coming back on Monday morning'*

*Participant no 7: 'I think she did not like the fact that people would ask her to do what they did not want to do, but she did it to protect herself as she was just a Learner even though she was also busy with other projects. I ended up challenging the person and asked her that why do you feel that you want someone to book you a room, a person can book a room through their own laptop'*

#### **5.5.3.4 Behaviour of participants after the incidents**

This axial coding theme provides a picture of the behavior of participants after the incidents.



The open codes identified are It brought an element of arrogance, nothing changed, demotivated and low morale.

### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* 'I continued raising points and possibly what I did differently was to bring an element of arrogance'

*Participant no 2:* 'Some of my colleagues in my new area started staying away from me'

*Participant no 2:* 'After sometime I could pick-up that he started respecting me because I stood my ground firmly'

*Participant no 3:* 'I thought the gossip was silly it didn't really bother me, nothing changed'

*Participant no 6:* 'I grew cold on her the Procurement Manager who was excluding me in her team activities'

*Participant no 7:* 'What happened is that motivation went down, the morale went down and the whole team felt that we just have to complete our project and move on with our lives'

### **5.5.4 Organisational interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities**

This selective coding theme indicates the interventions that the organisation is currently implementing to manage micro-inequities. The axial coding themes identified under this selective coding theme are: dedicated processes and support measures to manage micro-inequities, existing interventions in the organisation and recommended interventions by participants.

#### 5.5.4.1 Dedicated processes and support measures to manage micro-inequities

This axial coding theme outlines all the processes that victims indicated they could follow when they are subjected to any form of micro-inequities.

The open codes identified are, the Human Resource Department, ICAS (a contracted employee wellness organisation that offers telephonic and face to face advice and counseling to employees), Diversity & Inclusion sessions, code of conduct of the organisation, disciplinary process and I don't know, employee help line and mentoring program.

#### Examples of participant responses:

*Participant no 1:* 'The first point of contact is to engage with the Human Resource department were they would point you to the right direction. I actually don't know if there is a process which people can follow. 'I also know of ICAS support'

*Participant no 2:* 'No! I don't know of any process, maybe they do exist but people still don't believe in those processes or support measures just like myself when I experienced micro-inequities, I never thought of following a proper channel to solve the issues, so I think people are dying in their corner. I have made my own process in my mind'.

*Participant no 3:* 'Yes, there is a process that people can lodge a grievance and another would be to address it with the person if that is feasible or they can address it with the person's line alternatively they can seek telephonic or face to face assistance from ICAS'

*Participant no 4:* 'First of all we've got the code of conduct that gives you a clear indication of what you are supposed to do and what you are not supposed to do and obviously our disciplinary policy. We have cases where we use disciplinary process where people have treated other people by bullying and by violating the code of conduct, discrimination and dismissive language, disciplinary action has been used. You can phone the helpline and

you could put a complaint and obviously you can go to Human Resource department and lay a grievance’

*Participant no 5:* ‘I am sure there is a process, I am sure 80% of the employees are not aware of such a process. ‘There is also ICAS but I’ve never used it, I don’t know how ICAS works. I just think that line managers are not coached enough on managing people’’

*Participant no 6:* ‘Uh! there are Company values and morals, codes of conduct, it is obvious that the organisation acknowledges that micro-inequities do exist, they gave us booklets focusing on them. I also know that people do contact ICAS but I have never contacted ICAS’

*Participant no 7:* ‘I haven’t seen like an in-depth process focusing on micro-inequities, but I know the company does have sessions on Diversity & Inclusion which emphasis that we are diverse and we should respect one another. I think the company does have channels were you can report thinks like harassment, they do have options were you can contact ICAS’

*Participant no 8:* ‘Yes definitely there is a process. So first we have employee support programs (ICAS) which is open to this kind of situations and we also have mentorship in the organisation’

Over and above the processes, participants also responded on the aspect of support structures available. The previous two aspects covered what the organisation was doing for victims and the next section to follow will present the interventions that the organisation is currently implementing according to the knowledge of participants.

#### 5.5.4.2 Existing interventions in the organisation

This axial coding represents the interventions that the organisation is currently implementing with the aim of discouraging and removing behaviours and actions in line with micro-inequities based on participants' knowledge.

The open codes identified under this axial code are: no interventions, harassment session, employee opinion survey, diversity and inclusion sessions and I do not know.

#### Examples of participant responses:

*Participant no 1:* 'I don't think we have interventions that are discouraging micro-inequities. The employee opinion survey provides an opportunity to raise some of these issues relating to micro-inequities'

*Participant no 2:* 'I know the Human Resource department are addressing micro-inequities in the employee opinion survey'

*Participant no 3:* 'I don't think we are doing much as an organisation. Other than last year, and two years ago when we were doing a session about harassment'

*Participant no 4:* 'Well we rolled-out diversity and inclusion sessions last year but they did not cover everything relating to micro-inequities'

*Participant no 5:* 'I am sure there are interventions, I mean if you look at the employee opinion survey results and the high turnaround of staff, there must be a reason for it, the turnover is high. When people do exit interviews, how serious do they take what those people say'

*Participant no 6:* 'To be honest I do not know of any intervention. I don't know whether somebody has been fired, but I do know that they don't tolerate such behavior'

*Participant no 7:* 'I think the company is also coming strong on what is in people's minds on the employee opinion survey, what has been consistent though is that it came out people were feeling that they are not able to speak their mind. I think what the company did is that they have a help line were you can call to report incidents. But I am not sure if it is being used'

*Participant no 8:* 'We have the Uhuru journey (a diversity management intervention)'

The last theme represents all the recommendations made by participants with the hope that they would contribute towards preventing and removing micro-inequities in the organisation.

#### **5.5.4.3 Recommended interventions by participants**

This axial coding theme covers the suggested recommendations made by participants in relation to removing and discouraging micro-inequities from taking place in the organisation.

The open codes identified are: a transparent approach in dealing with micro-inequities, micro-inequity initiatives led by management, awareness sessions about micro-inequities, improve leadership skills, encourage reporting, consistent disciplinary, protect victims, anonymous box for complaints.

#### **Examples of participant responses:**

*Participant no 1:* "Management and the Human Resource department should deal with micro-inequities openly. Openly in a sense that they start making an example about the person who comes and say that this is what I am experiencing and share with us the action. I think the company needs to find a way of instilling values. For me leadership must walk the talk'

*Participant no 2:* 'The organisation should have a clear process which should be communicated to all employees'

*Participant no 3:* 'Firstly I think people need to be aware of micro-inequities. And also encourage people to voice out anything that is not appropriate. And probably what would be best would be to roll-out awareness sessions. The CEO and top management to endorse and communicate their believe'

*Participant no 4:* 'Basically the company should follow through what they say, the company should talk about this things and tell people if you do mistreat people in this company this will happen to you, because I don't think people believe that. The company should look at proper leadership style skills when they recruit employees, people who are currently in the organisation should also be up-skilled on how to treat people better'

*Participant no 5:* 'Well I think logically an example has to be made. I think it should all come from leadership, if a leader does not drive it, not referring to the CEO, but all the managers should drive the culture of discouraging micro-inequities. I think there must be a system in place to protect the victims'

*Participant no 6:* 'I think there should be transparency about how cases of micro-inequities are dealt with in the organisation. They should notify us that these behaviors exist and people have been fired for demonstrating them. I think the company should encourage us to speak more'

*Participant no 7:* 'I think for me the company should be more consistent in the way they relate to this circumstances, so if for instance we know that bullying is a no, no and should incidents of micro-inequities arise the company should take drastic decisions and be quick when they are addressing those issue'

*Participant no 8:* 'I think people are always scared of sharing what they are feeling because they fear that it might be a career limiting move. Maybe what we could have is an

anonymous chairman's box were anybody who has an issue that they want to share they can put it down anonymously'

The participants indicated the support structures, processes and the interventions that the organisation has in place to address micro-inequities. They further recommended interventions which were diverse and mostly focused on aspects that are aimed at preventing micro-inequities happening in the organisation. The participants also emphasized the protection of victims, the role of leadership and the emphasis on encouraging employees to open up and report any incident related to micro-inequities. The results presented in this chapter will be discussed in chapter 6.



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on interpreting and discussing the results of the study presented in Chapter 5 and integrating it to theory presented in Chapter 1, 2 and 3. The purpose of this study was to investigate the existence and the nature of micro-inequities in a South African organisation. What motivated this study was the limited focus on studies related to micro-inequities in South Africa. This study aimed to contribute to research knowledge of micro-inequities, especially from a South African perspective, by exploring the research objectives stated in Chapter 1. The discussion of the findings will follow the format of the four selective coding themes indicated in Chapter 5.

#### 6.2 Selective coding themes

There are four selective coding themes identified, namely confirming the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation, types of micro-inequities in the organisation, the impact of micro-inequities on the participants and the actions they took after the incidents and organisational interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities. These selective codes will be discussed in line with the responses from the participants.

##### 6.2.1 Confirming the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation

Under this selective coding theme, the focus was to establish the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation. There are two axial coding themes identified within this



selective coding theme, namely the existence of micro- inequities and the reasons to substantiate the responses in relation to the existence of micro-inequities

#### **6.2.1.1 The existence of micro-inequities**

From the responses presented by all the participants, it was confirmed that micro-inequities do exist in the organisation. The responses included ‘I actually think they exist, yes they do, I am convinced they exist and yes definitely I think they exist.’ All the eight participants mentioned that micro-inequities do exist in the organisation. According to Chering and Tate (2008:3), micro-inequities do exist in every organisation. It is clear that micro-inequities do exist in this organisation.

#### **6.2.1.2 The reasons to substantiate the participants’ responses in relation to the existence of micro-inequities**

The participants were able to substantiate their statements by providing examples in relation to the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation. The reasons why they believe that micro-inequities do exist in the organisation used in the study were based on reference to their personal experiences, incidents they have witnessed, what their colleagues have shared with them in relation to their own experiences and the annual employee opinion survey results which highlighted the issues that employees are experiencing in the organisation with regard to micro-inequities.

Although the sample used in the study did not represent all the employees in the organisation used in the study, the fact that the eight selected participants shared their experiences and were also able to share the incidents that they have either witnessed or heard from their colleagues, is evident enough to mention that there is a high probability that more employees might be experiencing micro-inequities in this organisation. The responses from the participants confirmed the first research objective of this study, which was to establish the existence of micro-inequities in the South African organisation.

## **6.2.2 Types of micro-inequities in the organisation**

The objective under this selective coding theme was to determine the types of micro-inequities that may exist in the organisation. There are four axial coding themes identified under this code. The axial coding themes are individual experiences with regard to micro-inequities, witnessing other victims, incidents shared by other victims and the perceived causes for the negative behaviour of perpetrators.

### **6.2.2.1 The individual experiences with regards to micro-inequities**

Participants shared their experiences in relation to micro-inequities. Among their experiences were complaints such as views not being recognized in meetings, lack of support from colleagues, being shouted at, malicious rumours which included gossips, positional power plays being used to abuse and threaten employees, exclusion from team activities, taking other people's credit for own success and acts of being devalued and humiliated. The participants were subjected to micro-inequities by either their colleagues or managers in the organisation. The examples shared from individual experiences by participants were in line with the five classified categories of micro-inequities highlighted in Chapter 2 by authors such as Young (2006), Sue (2010) and Singletary (2009). These examples fall under micro-messages, interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviors, and rankism and deviant behaviors

### **6.2.2.2 Witnessing other victims**

This axial coding theme indicates the examples of incidents that participants have witnessed in the organisation used in this study. Three participants were willing to share what they have witnessed. The remaining five participants did not share their experiences, while one specific participant was uncomfortable to share what he witnessed and mentioned that the incident was very specific and the researcher might be able to identify the specific incident. The examples of incidents witnessed by the participants included two separate situations where a new learner in the organisation was being bullied by a

perpetrator who would give her meaningless work which the perpetrator did not want to do. The same learner was also observed by another participant in continuous incidents where she would be overloaded with several activities by perpetrators who thought that she did not have enough work to do, without asking her.

It is obvious that the behaviors and actions mentioned do undermine the victim. It is clear that the perpetrators might have taken advantage of the fact that the learner was still new. One can only imagine how the learner felt and what was going through her mind. This can be very discouraging for a new employee in any organisation and even more to a person who has just entered the job market. Michelle (2010) argues that bullied targets are often not assertive, which poses a question of whether the incidents with the learner happened due to the fact that she was not assertive since it was indicated that the learner did nothing about the situation. This kind of behavior may also impact the reputation of the organisation, since there is a great chance that the learner may share her experiences with people outside the organisation.

The last example was of a participant who mentioned that his staff members were threatened and insulted by his peer who was also a line manager. The participant mentioned that this line manager was using authoritative power to continuously threaten and abuse him and his staff members. This kind of micro-inequity was mentioned by Rowe (2009) and Namie and Namie (2000) indicating that the perpetrators are often abusing their positional power by using it to ill-treat their victims. It is evident that positional power plays an important role in the type of micro-inequities existing in the organisation used in the study. It is discouraging to learn that leaders who are supposed to be protecting employees and leading by example are actually the perpetrators, as claimed by the participants.

### **6.2.2.3 Incidents shared by other victims**

This axial coding theme provides the feedback on what other victims have shared with the participants in this study. It appears that some of the employees in the organisation would

not report their incidents but would prefer confiding in their colleagues. This raises questions about why the participants are not reporting their perpetrators. The various examples of the complaints made by these employees include being insulted by either their colleagues or managers, which is in line with micro-messages, followed by continuously being attacked by their perpetrators which is predator bullying that falls under rankism, were a victim is intimidated as indicated by the definition of Fuller and Gerloff (2008).

Another incident indicated a deliberate act by a line manager who was perceived to be disadvantaging career progression of the victim by not allowing the particular individual to apply for internal jobs in the organisation. It is also evident that there are signs of interpersonal discrimination, since one participant emphasized favouritism as one of the issues where employees are not treated equally. In one incident it was mentioned that the line manager was reported to the help line in the organisation, but unfortunately due to lack of sufficient evidence the Human Resource Department did not pursue the case. This can be discouraging for victims to report incidents in future.

The fact that some participants are not reporting their incidents should be a serious concern to the organisation, since it may not know what is happening and the victim will also suffer while perpetrators may continue with their behaviours and actions. One should not discard the fact that confiding in colleagues is a bold step as it may not be easy for everyone to share personal experiences, especially on issues related to micro-inequities. Although the responses received have addressed the second research objective of establishing the types of micro-inequities that existed in the organisation, there is a need for further investigations to establish if there are more incidents different from the ones presented by the participants.

#### **6.2.2.4 The perceived causes for the negative behaviour of the perpetrators**

The participants differed in terms of their views regarding the factors that might have influenced their perpetrators to subject them to micro-inequities. Some of the participants

believe that the main factor influencing the perpetrators is their personality attributes which was linked to being insecure, together with feeling intimidated by the victims, jealousy and envy. Peterson (2002:317) mentioned that deviant behaviour may be best predicted based on personality variables and the nature of the situation in the workplace, which corresponds with the personality-based perception indicated by the participants. As for the envy, jealousy and feelings of intimidation experienced by the participants, this corresponds with the findings of Sloan (2010), who indicated that perpetrators decide to target the individuals they find threatening.

Another participant indicated the issue of race which corresponds with the initial study by Rowe (1974), where she studied the effects of micro-inequities on race and gender. Holder-Winfield (2009) also mentioned that micro-inequities increase when people are seen as different. There is also a perception that the perpetrator might have been under work pressures during the time of subjecting the victim under micro-inequities, as he was not coping. The preceding statement can be viewed as an attempt to justify and defend the bad behavior of the perpetrator. This kind of perception may lead to a potential increase in behaviours and actions related to micro-inequities, since the perpetrators may find reasons to justify their behaviors and actions.

Another perceived cause was self-blame, in which the participants assumed that perhaps they may have done something wrong, hence the treatment by the perpetrator. Irrespective of being the victims fault, bad treatment of others should never be encouraged. It also seems as if gossiping has become part of the culture in the organisation, which was supported by three participants. Gossip is considered to be an element of Rankism behaviours which violates dignity as described by Fuller and Gerloff (2008). No employee would feel good if their dignity is damaged by people who are spreading rumours about them.

Positional power was also indicated as a possible factor, especially for the line manager who was perceived to be dominant in meetings, as he was giving people instructions without asking their views. Another line manager was threatening to fire employees as she

was using the privilege of being close to top management. This kind of behavior was also mentioned by Rowe (2008:12), indicating that perpetrators are often people who have more power than their victims. Michelle (2010) argued that the perpetrator can be anyone, even a colleague on the same job level as the victim. It thus seems that positional power plays a significant role in the type of micro-inequities existing in the organisation used in the study. Two participants mentioned that they do not have any idea of what could have influenced their perpetrators to ill-treat them. Although this section presented the perceptions of the participants, there is an alignment with what was indicated by authors like Appelbaum et al., (2007) and Peterson (2002), in relation to the factors that could have influenced the perpetrators to subject their victims to micro-inequities.

### **6.2.3 The impact of micro-inequities on the participants and the actions they took after the incidents**

This selective coding theme provides the discussion on the findings based on the axial coding themes which includes the impact on the emotional of state of participants, participant's behavior after the incidents, the relationship between the participant and the perpetrator after the incidents, and actions taken by participants after the incidents.

#### **6.2.3.1 Emotional state of participants after the incidents**

The participants shared their feelings related to their experiences. They could clearly remember how they felt. It was clear that micro-inequities do have negative emotional implications for victims. The feelings after the incidents included participants feeling angry, rejected, undermined, disrespected, hurt, offended, sad, demotivated, worthless, less confident, belittled, humiliated and betrayed. These impacts identified confirm the effects mentioned by Appelbaum & Roy-Girard (2007), which included anger, low morale and despair. These feelings are intense and one could only imagine how the victims were coping. It is evident that micro-inequities pose an emotional threat to the victims. The concern still remains that if the victims do not report or disclose their situations, no one will be able to offer them support or aiding them to manage the situation more effectively.

One participant felt offended when the perpetrator was shouting at him. Another participant shared that she felt sad and demotivated and emphasized the negative feelings evoked after an incident when one line manager referred to her and her colleagues as people who do not have the intelligence to participate in his meetings. This can be considered as a form of deviant behavior described by Appelbaum and Shapiro (2006) who indicated that the perpetrators would often tend to belittle their victims. The same participant was also made to feel worthless by the feedback she got in which her line manager told her that she is incompetent in her current role and she should consider looking for different roles. By understanding all the emotions that the participants went through, it is evident that perpetrators can be cruel intentionally or unintentionally. Micro-inequities should never be taken for granted. With the kind of impact identified by the participants, victims will be distinctly negatively affected when exposed to micro-inequities.

### **6.2.3.2 Actions taken by participants after the incidents**

The participants shared the actions they took after they were subjected to micro-inequities. Their responses are classified under two sub-headings within this axial coding theme, namely confronting the perpetrators and reporting the incidents.

#### **6.2.3.2.1 Confronting the perpetrator**

One participant mentioned that members of their work team gave feedback to their team leader about him taking credit for the team's achievements, but this individual disregarded their feedback. The assumption would be that either the perpetrator disagreed with the feedback or he was just using his positional power as the team leader to disregard them. It was courageous for the team to confront the perpetrator. Another participant mentioned that she did not confront the perpetrator who used to ignore her views at meetings, but she since changed her attitude and started behaving in a more militant way which made the perpetrator to treat her with more respect.

The fact that she considered the act of the team leader to be subtle, she possibly thought that people might say she is complaining about petty things, which related, to the comment made by Rowe (2008), that often people do not believe that micro-inequities do exist since they are at times not easy to identify. The mentality of perceiving incidents as to be minor or little may be a barrier since other victims may also be thinking about how people will perceive them if they were to complain about issues which seems subtle or minor and eventually discourage them from reporting their experiences while the perpetrators may continue with their negative actions and behaviors.

Two participants confronted their perpetrators, while another participant decided to keep quiet due to fear of being victimized even further. One of the participants stated that she arranged individual meetings with her team members who were not supportive and not listening to her as a new team member and confronted them about their treatment. Unfortunately those team members decided to keep their distance from the participant. As a new team member in the organisation this situation can leave one with frustrations and regrets that one should not have joined the organisation. In another incident, the same participant also asked the colleague who was pointing at her with a finger and interrupting her discussions to have a talk with her, but the perpetrator refused to talk to her. It could be challenging if the perpetrator refuses to engage in a discussion, when one is endeavouring to solve problems through positive communication.

One of the participants did not confront the perpetrator who was shouting at him, but reported the incident to the line manager who took it up with the perpetrator. More leaders like this are needed to protect their team members. As for rumours, the same participant decided to ignore the incident since he was not sure of the source or the person who started the rumour. Another participant decided to resign as a result of a colleague who was bullying him and his team, but the line manager decided to convince him to retract the resignation, which he did. Rowe (2006:4) mentioned that victims often view resignation as a solution to their experiences pertaining to micro-inequities, which was also supported by Namie (2000). The concern should be about those victims who may resign without mentioning the real reasons for their resignations during their exit interviews.



Another participant took the minutes as instructed by the perpetrator at a meeting, but she stopped attending the meetings in that department. She reported the incident to her line manager. Regarding the issue with her colleague who was rude to her, she just ignored her but decided that she will never empower and support her in future. This shows that a perpetrator might also suffer the consequences of his/her negative behavior. From the information provided, it is encouraging to learn that some victims have the courage to confront their perpetrators or escalate the issues to their line managers. Hopefully the line managers will address the issues presented to them formally in support of their staff members, otherwise the victims may continue to suffer. The aim of the third objective, which was to determine the impact that micro-inequities had on the participants and the actions they took after the incidents, has been achieved through the responses presented.

#### **6.2.3.2.2 Reporting incidents**

The concern here is whether the participants are reporting their experiences or not. One can only imagine the frustration that the victims goes through since they are not reporting the incidents and this should be a concern for the impact it may have on them. One participant mentioned that she never reported the matter nor confronted the perpetrator as she was scared of the perpetrator. Another participant indicated that some of the victims do report the incidents since she is exposed to this kind of information as she is in the Human Resource Department where the victims are reporting cases to. Some of the participants also gave feedback on what they did when they were witnessing other colleagues being subjected to micro-inequities. One participant did not do anything when observing that a learner was being bullied, as she believes that she herself is fighting her own battles. Another participant decided to intervene and confront the perpetrator for abusing a new learner in their department. Kusey and Holloway (2009) suggest that it is advisable to approach the perpetrator and challenge their behavior. It takes courage for one to challenge a perpetrator on behalf of the victim.

Four participants shared that they have actually reported their incidents to their line managers. Only one participant mentioned that the malicious gossip about him having an

affair with the Head of their department did not elicit any reaction. Another participant shared that one victim actually resigned as a result of being denied career progression and this was also supported by another participant who mentioned that there were a lot of resignations and increased absenteeism due to the effect of micro-inequities, particularly due to the line manager who was often threatening and shouting at employees.

It was indicated that some of the victims would not talk about their experiences, while others would share this with their colleagues and some staff members in the Human Resource Department without laying formal complaints. As much as not all the victims may be confronting their perpetrators and logging formal complaints or reporting their incidents, the positive aspect is that they are able to share their experiences with other employees in the workplace, which may provide a sense of debriefing. The Human Resource Department seems to be providing advice to the victims and addresses the reported cases, although at times the resolution process was perceived to be slow, which can be discouraging to the victims. The second part of the third objective was to determine the actions that participants took after experiencing incidents.

#### **6.2.3.3. Actions by other colleagues who were subjected to micro-inequities**

From the responses provided by participants, it is evident that individuals react differently to micro-inequities. As much as some of the employees opted to leave the organisation, the concern remains for those who decided to keep quiet and stayed in the organisation. Brunner and Costello (2003) argues that employees who decide to stay in organisations after their experience as victims of micro-inequities tend to suffer both emotional and physical wellbeing. Although it was indicated that some of the employees shared their experience with the participants, the fact that other employees are still not doing anything about their experience does not mean that their situations will automatically come to an end. The comment made by one participant that some of the victims might be scared to report their incidents raises a serious concern about the culture of fear in the organisation. The fact that one participant managed to challenge the perpetrator who was bullying a new Learner, could be viewed as a positive way of discouraging micro-inequities. The more

employees are not reporting these negative experiences, the more difficult it will be to address micro-inequities in organisations.

#### **6.2.3.4 Behaviour of participants after the incidents**

Given all the experiences shared by the participants, it is evident that they were significantly negatively impacted. Overall the relationships were no longer the same as prior to the incidents. Some of the examples shared indicated that the participants were engaging with the perpetrators only at a professional level which only involved work, while another participant forgave the perpetrator but decided to keep a distance from her. One of the participants stated that her behavior changed and she ended up developing a more masculine approach which she believes is working for her at meetings in order to make herself heard. Unfortunately not everyone can have the boldness to change their attitude and assert themselves. It seems like there is a culture of survival of the fittest, where if one is not perceived to be strong one will be frustrated as one's voice will not be heard.

According to another incident, the perpetrator was perceived to have changed his bullying behavior and started to respect the participants since the victim stood firm and confronted the perpetrator after the incident. This indicates that if victims retaliate, there is a chance that the perpetrator may back-off, however this may not always be the case. As for the participant who was constantly threatened by a colleague who would also threaten this participant's team members, the impact was severely negative. This participant had to undergo serious medical treatment as a result of the stress caused by the treatment of his colleague. The relationship between this participant and the perpetrator, including other team members that the perpetrator used to threaten, deteriorated to a point that none of them wanted to work with her anymore. Such negative health impact was indicated by the research of Appelbaum and Roy-Girard (2007) that showed examples like high blood pressure and muscle tension as results of stress related to micro-inequity incidents.

One participant mentioned that after her experience, she lost her respect for the perpetrator who was perceived to be dominant and stopped attending meetings with the

perpetrator. This kind of behavior may in turn have an impact on both the performance of the victim and the perpetrator. The victim runs the risk to be placed under a disciplinary procedure, but fortunately for this participant her role was not dependent on the perpetrator's inputs, as it was just an added support which they could both do without. From the team members of the perpetrator who was perceived to be taking other people's credit and competing for success at the expense of his team members, it was mentioned that his behavior lowered the team's motivation and morale. The preceding dynamics support the research findings of Bret and Stroh (2003), that victims may develop feelings of despair and low morale.

#### **6.2.4 Organisational interventions aimed at managing micro-inequities**

This selective coding theme covered the aim of the third research objective which was to investigate the interventions that the organisation is implementing in order to manage micro-inequities. It is encouraging to learn that the organisation has put some interventions in place to manage micro-inequities. The interventions in the organisation are presented as axial coding themes, which are the dedicated processes and other support measures for managing micro-inequities and the existing interventions. The interventions included education and awareness sessions which are discussed in the following sections.

##### **6.2.4.1 Dedicated processes and support measures to manage micro-inequities**

Six participants confirmed that the organisation has support measures in place. One of the support measures which was mentioned by three participants is the counseling service offered by an employee wellness consulting organisation called ICAS. It is encouraging that the organisation is making efforts to support employees who are affected by micro-inequities. The Diversity & Inclusion awareness sessions, the organisation's code of conduct and the disciplinary policy of the organisation were also considered by participants as part of the processes that the organisation has in place for dealing with issues related to micro-inequities. The Human Resource Department was also mentioned as an entity where employees can report the incidents or seek advice. A help-line for reporting

incidents was also indicated as one of the processes in place. A significant concern is that the victims may not be utilizing the support measures or processes due to the lack of trust in these measures and fear that they might be victimized.

Even though the participants shared their knowledge of the organisation's support measures, two participants mentioned that they do not know of any process or measure dedicated to addressing issues pertaining to micro-inequities. The preceding statement was supported by another participant who indicated that it may be possible that 80% of employees may not be aware of the measures or processes that the organisation has in place. The fact that some of the employees are not aware of the processes within the organisation should be a serious concern, as it may be frustrating to victims when they do not know where to find positive assistance and support.

#### **6.2.4.2 Existing Interventions in the organisation**

The participants listed the interventions that the organisation is currently implementing in order to address micro-inequities. Two participants indicated that the organisation is not doing enough to address micro-inequities. Four of the participants indicated that employees are given the opportunity to raise their views and provide feedback on issues related to micro-inequities through the annual employee opinion survey. One concern with the survey is that it only requires quantitative responses and this might hinder the opportunity to understand the experiences of victims in relation to micro-inequities which could be achieved by utilizing a qualitative study. Three participants indicated that they were exposed to lunch and learn sessions presented, which covered diversity, inclusion and harassment. It appears that there is lack of awareness of the existing processes of addressing micro-inequities, as confirmed by some of the participants. The level of awareness pertaining to micro-inequities in the organisation may be low at present, but it is encouraging to see that the organisation is making efforts to create a culture of respecting differences and providing knowledge on harassment which can also be components of micro-inequities.

### 6.2.4.3 Recommended interventions by participants

All participants shared their views on what the organisation could do to more effectively manage micro-inequities. These are:

- An awareness of what micro-inequities are and the effect they have on both the employees and the organisation
- A formal process of dealing with incidents relating to micro-inequities should be communicated to all employees in order to ensure that everyone knows what steps they should follow should they be subjected to micro-inequities
- The development of leadership skills with emphasis on people management and interpersonal skills
- Encouraging employees to report incidents while their protection is also guaranteed
- A dedicated effort to ensure that all necessary and applicable disciplinary procedures are applied in a consistent manner with all perpetrators in order to ensure the credibility of the processes
- Transparency about the outcomes of the disciplinary process related to micro-inequity cases in order to provide evidence that the organisation is seriously addressing the issues reported by employees
- Leaders in the organisation should champion interventions related to micro-inequities which will demonstrate their commitment
- An anonymous box which will be used by employees to submit written notes reporting incidents related to micro-inequities to the attention of the Chief Executive Officer of the organisation

The proposed suggestions regarding the improving of awareness of micro-inequities has the potential to be a significant foundation for educating all employees about micro-inequities. Hopefully the education sessions will change the mindset of all employees in line with the ethical values and codes of conduct, with respect for others as a core value. The improvement of leadership skills was also one of the significant aspects suggested to be part of the solutions were leaders would be developed in the domains of people management and interpersonal skills. The preceding suggestion was informed by the fact

that some of the participants indicated that line managers are often the perpetrators who ill-treat employees. The suggestion about the anonymous CEO box could have both advantages and disadvantages, as some employees might also abuse such a facility, which will defeat the purpose of such a strategy.



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## **CHAPTER 7**

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter indicates the challenges experienced while conducting this study. The scheduling of interviews was a challenge as some of the participants had to reschedule more than twice due to operational commitments at work. The 1 hour maximum duration of the interview was limiting the asking and probing for more questions, since the participants were not willing to stay longer or have extra sessions with the researcher. This made it difficult for the researcher to probe further for more information. The other limiting factor was the fact that some of the objectives of the study were directed at exploring sensitive and personal experiences of participants, which made it difficult as some individuals approached were not willing to participate in the study due to this.





## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter indicates the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

#### 8.1 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the existence and the nature of micro-inequities in a South African organisation. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the objectives of the study, which were to investigate the extent to which micro-inequities exist in the organisation, to determine the nature of those micro-inequities, the impact that those micro-inequities have on employees and the interventions that the organisation has introduced with the aim of preventing and removing micro-inequities, were satisfactorily achieved. The feedback provided in the findings of the study regarding the nature of micro-inequities included views not being recognized, not getting support, being shouted at, malicious rumours, gossips, being threatened, abusive tendencies, being excluded and devalued. The feedback was based on individual experiences, witnessing of other victims and the experiences shared with the participants. It is a concern to note that the organisation is poorly informed of the incidents that are taking place, since some of the participants indicated that they never reported the incidents.

The findings were in line with the five categories of micro-inequities identified in Chapter 5, classified as micro-messages, interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviour, rankism and deviant behaviour. It was found that the experiences by the participants are significantly related to the types of micro-inequities presented in Chapter 2 of the study. Based on the demographic representation of participants indicated in Chapter 5 of the study, the data indicate that micro-inequities are experienced by anyone irrespective of race or gender.

The preceding statement links with the argument by Moynahan (2008), which states that micro-inequities take place across all cultures and genders.

It is intriguing to learn about the impact that micro-inequities had on the emotions and the behaviours of participants, and the relationships between the participants and their perpetrators after the incidents. The examples of emotional impacts shared by participants, such as feeling angry, bullied, disrespected, rejected, sad, angry, worthless, belittled, disappointed, undermined and disrespected, supported the examples provided by authors such as Acas (2005), Jetson (2005) and Young (2006) in Chapter 2 of the study. It is encouraging that some participants had the courage to confront the perpetrators, while others reported the incidents instead of keeping quiet.

Although some participants were able to indicate the interventions that the organisation is implementing to address micro-inequities, it remains a concern that some of the participants were not aware of these interventions. Perhaps knowledge of the interventions can make a difference to the current state of micro-inequities in the organisation if every employee was to be aware of it. The recommended interventions by the participants are found to be reasonable and relevant to addressing micro-inequities except for the CEO anonymous box which might encourage employees to intentionally discredit their colleagues by making false accusations.

It is evident that employees of the organisation used in this study have experienced micro-inequities as confirmed during the interviews, and that their experiences were not pleasant. However, one cannot conclude that all employees in the organisation and even in other organisations in South Africa have been subjected to micro-inequities, since the sample size is not adequately representative to justify the conclusion. Chering and Tate (2008) however argued that everyone who has ever been in a workplace has been subjected to micro-inequities. In order to have a justifiable conclusion on micro-equities, further studies should be conducted using more representative samples.

The researcher believes that the selected research methodology applied, particularly the data gathering method of interviewing participants, contributed to the success of this study. This method allowed the researcher to have immediate follow-up questions and ask for clarity where necessary. Since a qualitative approach was used, the participants were enabled to willingly share their experiences during the interviews. The findings of this study will contribute to current knowledge of micro-inequities particularly from a South African workplace perspective. Despite the challenge that the investigated topic was sensitive, the participants were willing to share their experiences.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

This section indicates the recommendations for future research and to the organisation used in the study.

### **8.2.1 Recommendations for the organisation used in the study:**

- More awareness of the concept of micro-inequities and its various forms, the impact thereof on both individuals and the organisation and the potential factors that triggers micro-inequities;
- A dedicated organisation-wide qualitative study in a form of a survey, face to face semi-structured interviews and focus groups, aiming to establish the existence and the extent of micro-inequities, its nature and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation;
- Incorporate micro-inequities awareness in the organisation's diversity management programs;
- Quarterly organisation wide facilitated dialogue sessions and bulletins on micro-inequities;
- Roadshows on Human Resource policies, processes and support systems related to the code of conduct, diversity management, employee relations and micro-inequities;
- Implementation of aggressive measures to deal with perpetrators;
- Strong focus on ensuring protection of victims.

## 8.2.2 Recommendations for future research:

- Further research on micro-inequities in other organisations in South Africa should be conducted in order to increase the level of knowledge from a South African perspective;
- More objectives should be included in future studies which could include aspects such as the impact of micro-inequities on the organisation, the coping mechanisms that the victims use and also add a question which will be aimed at inquiring if participants have ever subjected their colleagues to micro-inequities and their motivations for such behavior or actions;
- Future studies of micro-inequities should also ensure full representation of race, gender and age in order to provide in-depth knowledge across various demographics.

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## **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT (SEMI-STRUCTURED) INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Do micro-inequities exist in this organisation? Why do you think micro-inequities exist in this organisation?
2. What kind of micro-inequities have you experienced?
3. Have you ever witnessed anyone being subjected to micro-inequities? If the answer is yes what happened to that person?
4. Has anyone ever confided in you regarding their experiences as victims of micro-inequities; if the answer is yes what happened to that person?
5. What do you think could have motivated the perpetrator to act or behave in that manner?
6. How did you feel after the incident? What did you do about that incident? What did your colleague/s do about the incident?
7. What kind of impact did the experience have on you?
8. What support measures and processes are available for victims of micro-inequities in the organisation?
9. What interventions does the organisation have in place in order to discourage and prevent micro-inequities?
10. Which interventions would you recommend for the organisation in order to prevent and address issues related to micro-inequities?