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Validation of an Existing Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale Within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The local government workplace in post-apartheid South Africa represents an important environment to examine employee perceptions on the occurrence of microaggressions. However, since the advent of democracy in 1994, the country has faced numerous challenges in its quest for the implementation of rights pertaining to unity, diversity, inclusion and non-racialism. The main struggle is for the country to create an inclusive workforce that responds to fundamental rights enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution of 1996 which stipulates: 'we are united in our diversity'. This article intends to assess microaggressions and social cohesion at the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) in order to find out whether the Microaggressions Theory developed in the field of psychology in the United States of America (US) could be applied in the field of public administration in South Africa. The aim is to determine whether subtle forms of negative behaviour or environmental indignities contribute to perceptions of enduring racism and discrimination in a diverse workplace. A mixed methods approach was followed. The reliability and validity of an existing questionnaire, developed in the US by a psychologist, were tested in the CTMM. The statistical relationship between types of racial microaggressions and social cohesion, which forms part of the South African government's policies towards enhancing race relations in the country, was also measured. Results indicated that the Microaggressions Theory can be applied in the field of public administration in South Africa.

1 | Introduction

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, apartheid as a legalised system of racial discrimination was abolished. The country's first majority government's actions towards achieving transformation and addressing the country's racially divided past included a legal approach. This entailed the immediate repeal of a number of apartheid laws. A new constitution was adopted, providing the foundation for a non-racial and equitable society with equal opportunities for all its citizens. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter referred to as the Constitution) confirms non-racialism as a founding provision

and in addition protects all citizens against unfair discrimination based on race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, pregnancy, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, marital status or birth (South Africa 1996). Chapter 10 of the Constitution explicitly spells out that public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles that are enshrined in the Constitution, which thus entails applying the above principles within a public administration environment (South Africa 1996).

One of the challenges facing the new democratic government after 1994 was to create an inclusive workforce in the country.

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The aim was to redress inequalities of the past and to ensure that race does not hamper opportunity, thus contributing to unity and social cohesion in the country (National Planning Commission 2011, 34, 137). While inclusivity and equity applied to the South African workforce in its entirety, including the private sector, specific emphasis was placed on reforming and transforming the public sector to ensure that the workforce reflects the demographics of the country. Transformation of the public sector since 1994, mostly through affirmative action and employment equity policies, has therefore led to the diversification of the workforce on national, provincial and local spheres of government (Department: Employment and Labour 2020, 9). This transformation process therefore also had to be undertaken by the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) which is the locus of this research. However, according to the Microaggressions Theory, which was developed in the field of psychology in the United States of America (US), such a diverse workforce creates an environment where racial microaggressions will inevitably transpire.

Proponents of the Microaggressions Theory maintain that racial microaggressions are prevalent despite laws being in place globally to address overt forms of racism, discrimination and other intolerances (Nadal 2011; Sue et al. 2007). Racial microaggressions are defined as subtle, unconscious behaviours that communicate demeaning messages and derogatory or daily insults which devalue specific groups or individuals. They are also defined as subtle, mostly unintentional acts of interpersonal, perceived racism or discrimination that are often committed by people with egalitarian values, commonly due to prejudice, bias and stereotyping (Gonzalez-Gorman 2018; Nadal 2011; Sue et al. 2007; Torino et al. 2019; Torres-Harding and Turner 2015).

Legislation protecting individuals against forms of racism and discrimination is supported by the acknowledgement that race and racism matters in a global context. This is evident in the existence of the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (United Nations 1966). The ICERD came into force in 1996 and is regarded as an international legal instrument binding all member states to the elimination of racial discrimination and racism. Governments are expected to implement the Convention in their countries and to report on progress towards addressing racism and racial discrimination to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). This includes the implementation of policies to address prejudices that engender intolerance and racism. Generally, blatant or direct racism is regarded as insidious and unlawful, and legislation had therefore been put in place in countries worldwide to address forms of racism and discrimination. In adherence to its international human rights obligations, and as a signatory to the Convention, the South African government introduced the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 (Act 4 of 2000) (PEPUDA) to address, prevent and implement measures against unfair discrimination, harassment and hate speech. Further, the South African government has enacted the Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act 66 of 1995) to protect employees in the workplace and provide for fair labour practices. The South African government also saw the need for a non-legal approach, introducing the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and

Related Intolerance (NAP) (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2019a) which was approved by the Cabinet in March 2019. The NAP is a public policy addressing all forms of racial, ethnic and gender, sexual orientation, disability, language and religion-based intolerance, racism, discrimination, hate speech and xenophobia. The policy also prohibits any form of prejudice against individuals and groups based on the above and makes provision against more subtle or indirect forms of discrimination hidden in policies, laws and practices. It also places a specific responsibility on municipalities to participate in this endeavour (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2019a, 7–9; Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2019b, 19–25). Further to the introduction of the NAP, the South African government has made the achievement of social cohesion and non-racialism a priority in policy documents such as in the country's National Development Plan (NDP), its National Strategy on Social Cohesion and Nation-Building for South Africa, and its 20-year Review on Identity, Non-Racialism and Social Cohesion (Department of Arts and Culture 2012; National Planning Commission 2011, 411–430; The Presidency 2014). Other policy documents highlighting the importance of social cohesion in the country include the Medium-term strategic framework 2014–2019 (hereafter the MTSF 2014–2019) and the Medium-term strategic framework 2019–2024 (hereafter the MTSF 2019–2024) with one of their aims being to enhance relations among a diverse population (Republic of South Africa 2014; Department: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation 2019). The policy documents recognise that pressing issues such as inequality, poverty and unemployment in the country hamper social cohesion, but in addition maintain that the salience of racism and prejudice, stereotypes and forms of discrimination also impedes progress towards social cohesion. It is believed that prevailing intolerance in South Africa—which is visible in continuing racist actions, forms of prejudice and negative attitudes towards integration, and mistrust between people of different race groups, despite policies and actions promoting nation-building and reconciliation—can be addressed should South Africa be more cohesive (Ballard 2019, 20; David et al. 2018, 34).

This article focuses on racial microaggressions within the field of public administration in South Africa based on the case of CTMM. The paper is divided into six sections. Section one outlines a taxonomy of racial microaggressions. Section two examines microaggressions theories within the field public administration. Section three discusses the methodology followed. Section four presents the results and discussion. Section five highlights the new model that emerged from the analysis. Section six highlights the South African REMS Model before the paper can conclude.

2 | A Taxonomy of Racial Microaggressions

The first classification for types of racial microaggressions was developed by Sue et al. (2007) who focussed on the experiences of people of colour in the US, indicating that these concepts are context-dependent. Sue and colleagues' (Sue et al. 2007) taxonomy classifies and explains the different types of racial microaggressions. The taxonomy includes three forms of racial

microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.

- *Microassaults* are verbal or non-verbal, they refer to more overt or explicit and often conscious behaviours or actions.
- *Microinsults* ((i) assumptions that a person has lesser intelligence, (ii) being treated as a lesser group or person, (iii) assumptions that values and how people communicate are not the norm, and (iv) assumptions that someone may be more prone to criminality); and
- *Microinvalidations* ((v) assumptions that racial or ethnic minority citizens are foreigners in their country, (vi) colour-blind statements which deny the racial identity and history of a person, or the importance of race, (vii) denial of individual racism, and (viii) assumptions made regarding the myth of meritocracy), under which those eight categories are described.

Another form can be added to the taxonomy includes environmental manifestations, which is about policies that exclude specific groups or individuals (Sue et al. 2007, 278). *Environmental microaggressions* can be regarded as insults and invalidations that occur on the macro-level. Such microaggressions are present in systems and environments, such as in exclusionary policies and in the absence of visual symbols or artefacts representing a specific race group, or the absence of representation of people of one's race in a specific setting (Sue et al. 2007, 278). For instance, Torino et al. (2019, 8) refer to Offensive flags or statues of people who are regarded as having supported racism and that are being displayed in open areas, as environmental microaggressions. An example within the South African context is about a ruling that was pronounced in 2019 by the Deputy Judge in the Equality Court in Gauteng insisting that displaying the old South African flag reminds black people in the country of their oppression; it is hurtful and painful, and it causes them extreme emotional stress (Mabuza 2019).

3 | Microaggressions Theories Within Public Administration Scholarship

While the natural sciences mainly depend on one theory, the social sciences sometimes use multiple theories to better explain phenomena and to enhance understanding of the phenomenon that is, being studied (Ngulube et al. 2015, 4, 11). The Microaggressions Theory, as developed and applied within the field of psychology, forms the foundation of this research and provides a framework to examine perceptions of racial microaggressions within a specific public administration context and their relevance in terms of specific aspects of social cohesion. This is done using a BPA approach and a Critical Theory perspective. Although the impetus for this research is racial microaggressions in the field of psychology, and specifically racial microaggressions as experienced by individuals who self-identify as belonging to specific racial and ethnic groups, research done from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) approach, focussing on the Black-White binary, is also included since much research on microaggressions had been done from this perspective. In addition, this research ascribes to some tenets of CRT. However, three theories guided the underpinning of this

article, namely: Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Microaggressions Theory.

3.1 | Critical Theory

Critical Theory refers to a 'paradigm of empirical research' (Morrow and Brown 1994, 6). Critical Theory sets out to challenge an existing situation and aims for a society that is, democratic and balanced. It concerns itself with power dynamics within society and the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc (Asgar 2013, 3123; Steyn 2010, 53). Rocco et al. (2014, 458) argue that Critical Theory can be seen as a tool to assist people in understanding the social structures that are dominating and oppressive, and to help them overcome these structures. Critical Theory derives from liberalism and supports the notion that traditions and social practices must be regularly evaluated and amended to the benefit of society and the dignity of all. Any Critical Theory must meet three criteria to be sufficient. It must explain what is wrong with the social reality. It must be practical, and therefore it must be able to identify who the actors are who must change reality. It must be normative, providing well defined norms to criticise social reality so as to bring about social transformation (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2015). A critical perspective acknowledges that tension exists between what the individual strives for and the limitations that are inflicted on individuals by social conditions. This includes limitations that individuals are only vaguely aware of. Theory must therefore reveal these contradictions to allow true freedom (Denhardt 1998, 629). The concern of critical theorists lies with oppression and social inequalities. Critical Theory can be regarded as a liberating theory that aims to critique and change society as a whole. Its main aim is not only to interpret and to describe the social world, but to affect change and transformation towards social justice in the world (Visser and Moleko 2016, 57).

3.2 | Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) explores inequities in a social, political and economic context, and it sees these injustices as a function of racism (Rocco et al. 2014, 460). Further, Rocco et al. (2014, 457–470) maintain that CRT concerns itself with equity regarding the total identity of a person and this could include, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other identities. Thus, the authors argue that CRT is based on the principle that categories of race and racism are prevalent and overlap with other forms of domination or repression, such as gender and class discrimination. Their proposed solution is that CRT must form the basis from which to criticise power structures, scrutinise organisational policies and programmes so that change should occur to ensure that all people have equal opportunities, and that harassment and discrimination in the workplace are removed. Huber and Solórzano (2015, 1) maintain that CRT can assist to identify and address racism that causes the marginalisation and exclusion of people of colour. Hylton (2010, 335, 338, 339) states that advocates of CRT do not ask whether we live in a racist society, but concludes that we do and that we need to address it. The author highlights that CRT

is transdisciplinary, therefore it does not stand in isolation as a social theory. Embrick et al. (2017, 6) posit that a CRT approach to racial microaggressions assists to better understand the links between the intended or unintended discriminatory acts and the ideologies and institutional mechanisms that keep it in place as if it is normal or acceptable.

3.3 | Microaggressions Theory

Microaggressions was initially defined and classified in the field of psychology as ‘racial microaggressions’, to provide a tool for mental health professionals to better understand, identify and monitor the occurrence of subtle racism during therapeutic sessions. Sue et al. (2007) posited that especially white therapists, who mainly regard themselves as non-racist, unbiased and just, must become aware of their own biases and how issues of race influence the therapeutic process when they assist clients of colour. This is because they may unknowingly and unintentionally cause psychological harm to these clients which may affect their health. Further, Sue et al. (2007) maintain that while their focus is on racial microaggressions in the field of psychology and especially in therapeutic relationships, racial microaggressions are most likely to occur in all interracial interactions between people, which would therefore also include those interactions within a public sector environment. It is posited that racial microaggressions are not only enacted by white people but can entail inter-ethnic occurrences between people of colour, or in instances where a person of colour is in a position of power, in relation to a white person. An example of the latter is given as when a therapist—who is in a position of power in relation to his or her client—is a person of colour and the client is white. The Microaggressions Theory further postulates that while other indignities such as everyday rudeness or disrespect may be experienced by all people, racial microaggressions are more stressful to the receiver thereof, since it is always possible that race, gender, sexual orientation or other specific identities have led to these microaggressions. This relates to the fact that, historically, marginalised groups (which can include people of colour, LGBTQ or women) may have been exposed to previous discrimination or microaggressions and would be more sensitive to the role of their specific identity group during interpersonal interactions. Thus, when people who are regarded as part of a historically privileged group such as white people, heterosexual people or men, are guilty of incivilities, even though unintended, it may be more easily regarded as microaggressions by the receiver (Sue et al. 2007; Torino et al. 2019, 24). The theory proposes that members of historically privileged groups are in a better position, due to their privileged status, to identify other reasons for incivilities against them, such as that the perpetrator was just merely rude, instead of identifying the act as a microaggression which is directed at them based on their race, gender or other specific identity (Torino et al. 2019, 5). In addition, it is difficult for those who are empowered to recognise their own biases and prejudice (Wong et al. 2013, 194).

To address challenges presented by issues of race within public administration, this study is positioned within the field of public administration to empirically examine whether the

Microaggressions Theory can be applied within a public administration environment in South Africa, and specifically within the CTMM, which was identified as the locus of the research.

While the Microaggressions Theory posits that interactions between diverse people will lead to experiences of racial microaggressions, social cohesion had been extensively examined in various disciplines with regards to how, or if, it is obstructed by diversity, mostly in terms of how individuals identify themselves in terms of an ‘in-group’ or ‘out-group’. Such research examined how and whether intergroup contact could enhance trust and cohesion and reduce prejudice, based on Allport’s (1954) Contact Theory, and show conflicting results. Allport (1954) maintained that prejudice between minority and majority groups may be reduced by means of intergroup contact, but under specific conditions. These conditions include equality of the groups’ status within a specific context, the groups pursuing common goals, and when contact between these groups are endorsed by authorities and legislation (Allport 1954, 281; Paluck et al. 2019, 130). Allport (1954) however did recognise that intergroup contact may also have negative effects and may worsen relations. It is evident that there are different perspectives on whether diversity and intergroup contact erode prejudice and increase good group relations. Putnam (2007, 138, 148), for example, posited that diversity in US neighbourhoods erodes solidarity, social capital and trust between people from different ethnic groups. However, Finchilescu and Tredoux (2010, 231) argue that there is good reason to expect that, in a post-apartheid South Africa, contact due to legally enforced segregation being discarded after 1994, will increase good race relations with the expectation that this will lead to more interaction and less hostility. They argue, however, that meaningful contact between different race groups must take place in the everyday lives of people. Similarly, Hewstone (2015) and Mckenna et al. (2018) further maintain that intergroup contact between diverse groups do enhance different aspects of social cohesion and Letki’s (2008) research on racial diversity in Britain found that neighbourhoods with higher levels of interaction show more trust and mutual benefit.

4 | Methodology

A mixed methods approach was followed and it consisted of a literature review and an empirical study aimed at answering the research questions, test hypotheses and determine whether the Microaggressions Theory can be applied within the CTMM. The main question in this study was to find out whether the Microaggressions Theory, designed and applied in the US context, could be applied within a public administration environment in South Africa, particularly within the CTMM. Hypotheses, based on the background to the study aimed to determine the application of the Microaggressions Theory in the field of public administration, are as follows: *H1*—There exists a statistical association between each of the self-identified demographic groups, namely, race/population group, gender, age groups; occupational levels, ethnicity groups (mother tongue) and disability status and their experiences of each type of racial microaggression, namely, microinsults, microinvalidations and environmental

microaggressions. And *H2*—there exists a statistical association between the experiences of different types of racial microaggressions and aspects of social cohesion, which includes comfort in engaging with other colleagues, being part of a team and working towards a common goal, and feelings of belonging in the organisation. In terms of the qualitative approach, a review of literature was done and it was coupled with open-ended questions used for the survey. This latter was regarded as the most appropriate method to address the research question pursued.

4.1 | Mitigation and Limitation

Approval was obtained from the psychologist, Dr Kevin Nadal, who was responsible for the development of the REMS, to make use of this scale. After obtaining permission from the developer of the REMS, minimal changes were made to the existing instrument to specifically address perceptions of racial microaggression experiences within a workplace (i.e., CTMM), since the REMS was developed to measure racial and ethnic microaggressions among a general population. To contribute to triangulation, open-ended questions were added to the existing instrument to examine perceptions of respondents in terms of how it made them feel to respond to the statements in the questionnaire, what they thought the questionnaire aimed to measure as well as their perceptions in terms of management contributions to positive diversity interventions.

4.2 | Data

The target population included permanent employees of the CTMM, spread across the total jurisdiction of the municipality. The latest employee database provided by the CTMM's Group Human Capital Department comprised a population of 29,419 employees. A sample size of 500 was drawn based on all employees with access to e-mail addresses. Out of 500 only 319 usable questionnaires were received. In terms of self-identifying within a specific race/population group, of the total respondents of 319, 152 (47.6%) employees self-identified as Black African, 122 (38.6%) as White, nine (2.8%) as Indian/Asian, 15 (4.7%) as Coloured, and 20 (6.3%) preferred not to say or indicated 'other'.

4.3 | Analysis

The study measured the statistical relationship between types of self-reported racial microaggressions and social cohesion which forms an important part of the South African government's policies towards enhancing race relations in the country. Open-ended questions, added to the instrument, provided a platform for the voices of employees to be heard in terms of their expectations of diversity interventions in the CTMM, as well as their experiences of racial microaggressions. Firstly, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis highlighted that the REMS model did not show adequate fit in the South African context and did not show convergent and discriminant validity. An Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed a new eight-factor model shown to be a valid measure of racial microaggressions within the CTMM. The Pearson product moment correlation indicated statistically

significant relationships between all combinations of the eight variables. A chi-square test and the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test indicated statistical associations between the newly identified racial microaggressions factors, namely, Avoidance and Segregation and race/population group, mother tongue/ethnicity and occupational level; between Assumptions of Inferiority and race/population group; between Substandard Treatment and gender; between Representation in Top or Prominent Positions in the Organisation, race/population group and mother tongue/ethnicity; between Positive Portrayal of 'people of my race' in the Organisation and mother tongue/ethnicity, and between Microinvalidations and occupation level.

5 | Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal differences within categories in terms of their racial microaggressions experiences. The Principal Component Analysis revealed that the social cohesion items added to the instrument, formed one factor. The final structural model indicated acceptable goodness-of-fit. Finally, structural path coefficients indicated statistically significant relations between specific racial microaggressions and social cohesion. These results reveal that less exposure to Avoidance and Segregation and Objectification is associated with social cohesion. In addition, the reverse scored factor indicated that Positive Portrayal of 'people of my race' in the Organisation and Microinvalidations, in terms of not seeing race or colour, are associated with social cohesion. These results indicated that the Microaggressions Theory can be applied within the field of public administration, and specifically the CTMM, although microaggressions are context-dependent. Based on data analysis, the results in the following.

5.1 | Qualitative Analysis

5.1.1 | Results of Theme 1: Perceptions of Transformation, Inclusivity and Good Relations

Responses in Theme 1 indicate perceptions of progress towards transformation and good relations and include positive comments towards the CTMM as an inclusive work environment where respondents experience a sense of belonging and working well in teams. The four sub-themes under Theme 1 will be elaborated on separately.

5.1.1.1 | Perceptions of Transformation and Good Relations. Older participants in the study (older than 41 and most of them older than 51) who belong to a generation with personal and direct experience of the discrimination and segregation of apartheid, specifically noted that there have been positive change and progress in transforming the public sector workplace. Positive perceptions of change and progress are supported by comments made by many others of varying ages, gender identities, across occupational levels and race categories and people with disabilities who perceive their workplace as an inclusive environment where they feel happy and experience a sense of belonging, which relates to one aspect of social cohesion.

5.1.1.2 | Inclusivity and Belonging. Comments revealing the workplace as a positive and welcoming environment where people feel they belong, include: 'I'm in the right organisation', the CTMM provides a 'favourable working environment' and 'a good working environment'. Another stated that within the organisation he feels 'free', while one respondent specifically referred to feeling free because of a knowledge of being equal to 'others'. Other feelings include being 'happy', feeling 'appreciated', feeling 'very important' and feeling 'empowered'. Two respondents indicated that they feel they are part of a family, while another described a 'sense of belonging' and two respondents indicated that they feel 'comfortable' and 'relaxed'. Another respondent commented that he feels part of the bigger picture and adding value. While the above comments show satisfaction with the work environment, and a sense of belonging and inclusivity, specific reference is also made by employees in terms of their interaction with colleagues. In terms of aspects of cohesion, comfort with interaction and working with colleagues in a team or accepting the need to do so, is evident in a number of responses. These interactions and teamwork with colleagues in the workspace are perceived as positive and occur without any indication that coercion is necessary to do so.

5.1.1.3 | Working in Teams. The importance of respect towards colleagues and the comfort of working in teams (one indicator of social cohesion) is expressed across identities and can be seen in the following comments: 'I work well with all my colleagues and understand that there are cultural differences which we must respect'; 'I feel comfortable working with other races'; and 'I've been working with my team for many years and not once did I feel side lined because of my race'. Others added: 'I truly feel that in my section we work as a group—respecting each other' and 'I feel very lucky to not have any experience of racial tensions'.

5.1.1.4 | No Experience of Types of Microaggressions. While some respondents gave no comment or indicated that they are indifferent in terms of how the comments in the instrument made them feel, one respondent indicated: 'I have never experienced it', while another added that, since he has never experienced it, he feels 'safe and comfortable'. Another respondent commented: 'I am very comfortable, and I have experienced no negativity towards me or my views. I also accept anyone's positive input and advice from any other'. One respondent commented that he is not affected in any way, while others included similar sentiments: 'No effect on me' and 'I'm ok with this', 'comfortable' and 'relaxed'. Another added that she sees herself as an employee of the CTMM, has the knowledge to do her job and has a positive attitude towards her workplace.

5.1.2 | Results of Theme 2: Salience of Microaggressions

Despite the positive perceptions of progress towards transformation, comments show how forms of racial microaggressions are perceived to be salient within the organisation. Responses provide a picture of how some participants perceive that they are still being judged by the colour of their skin and

experience prejudiced behaviour. Experiencing forms of racism and discrimination and feelings of not belonging in the organisation are also expressed. Some comments indicate that respondents feel that microaggressions or other forms of prejudice or discrimination do not have a personal impact on them, but it is rather their observation of how these occurrences are prevalent in the organisation. It is also evident from the results that most feelings of not receiving equal treatment relate to employment opportunities and are not due to individual behaviour of colleagues. Most of these comments were in response to the question requesting respondents to indicate how they feel after replying to the statements in the instrument.

5.1.2.1 | Personal Experience. Microaggressions in the form of microinsults (mostly unintentional behaviour or comments that are perceived as insulting or humiliating) experienced on a personal level, is seen in the following response: 'A colleague once wiped her pen after I used it. Since then, I just say hi to her only. Most whites don't greet blacks if they find you are black, they keep quiet they only greet their white counterparts. Only one white person in my work place didn't have this attitude for the 11 years I have worked in the municipality'. In answer to the question how the statements in the instrument made respondents feel, one respondent commented: 'I feel bad because it happens daily'.

5.1.2.2 | Observations of Segregation. A respondent recounted how segregation is accepted as the norm: 'it's very hard, once a mayor hosted a "take a girl child to work" dinner. All black girls were seated together, all white girls were seated together it was posted in the whole city intranet no one saw the wrong in the picture including the mayor himself. I was shocked'. She concludes: 'we still have a long way to go'. Another added: 'there is still some stereotypes that still exists towards ethnicity and there is also sense of avoidance when meeting in corridors or open spaces with people of different race'. Another confirmed this observation by commenting, 'you see in my employment when we hold end of the year parties, people sit according to their racial groups and there is minimal interaction to the point of seeing others feeling out of place. That's just my observation'.

5.1.2.3 | Substandard Treatment. In terms of the Microaggressions Theory, some forms of microinsults are grouped under the theme Second-class Citizen, which relates to perceptions of being devalued, receiving substandard treatment or being 'treated as a lesser group', and others are grouped under the theme Assumptions of Inferiority, also referred to as Ascriptions of Intelligence, which relates to perceptions that a person's intelligence is underestimated (Nadal 2011, 474; Sue et al. 2007, 278; Sue 2010, 31–93). Very few respondents expressed opinions in terms of Assumptions of inferiority or Ascriptions of intelligence. One respondent indicated that he feels 'frustrated' and added 'Be open and frank. Stop thinking I am stupid'. Another indicated feelings of being undervalued because his experience, knowledge or opinions are overlooked: 'A whole lot uneasy, especially that my opinions are often overlooked. Especially that Black people have to always prove themselves, despite their qualifications. What is puzzling is that Black people have to prove themselves to other Black people, Black people who

know how qualified and capable Black people are'. Perceptions of substandard or unequal treatment or being devalued include some comments which merely refer to being treated differently or unfairly without giving detail as to why such treatment is experienced. One woman indicated she feels that people are sometimes treated unfairly at work due to the race they belong to, while another stated she does not know where she stands in the organisation and she is 'treated differently because of the colour of my skin'. Specific comments from some White employees indicate feelings of being 'left out' or treated as a lesser group, excluded and not belonging: 'That it is possible for people to feel excluded because of their race and that a culture of tolerance and respect must be created' and 'I do not belong in the organisation and am not valued'. Comments from respondents also show a fear that their culture is not recognised and that their voices are not heard in the organisation since they are now the minority. One respondent commented: 'Explore and promote ALL cultures. For us to build a better future you must remember where you came from, mistakes and all'. He goes on to say that it should not be assumed that, because he is white, he belongs to a specific political party and adds: 'You cannot demand respect for your culture by wiping mine away, by denying me the opportunity to celebrate who I am and where I came from. I happen to be white but I am an African and have been for more than 200 years'.

5.1.2.4 | Perceptions of Unfair or Selective Treatment in Terms of Employment Opportunities. Overall, respondents highlighted negative comments which are similar to those already found in the employee satisfaction survey, for example, perceptions of a politicised work environment, nepotism and favouritism when it comes to appointments or advancement. In addition, employment equity is regarded as a form of biasness by some. These perceptions in turn lead to feelings of exclusion or not belonging in the organisation, being treated unfairly or being devalued, and experienced as reverse racism by a few White respondents who commented that appointments must be based on merit. Reference is made by a number of respondents to the organisation being politicised. Such comments include that appointments of senior personnel should not be politically motivated, that 'Politics and Council must be separate' and that qualified people with the knowledge and experience should be appointed, and not because they are part of a political party. One respondent replied that he does not know what to feel about the statements in the instrument since it will not make any difference and adds that the workplace should not be politicised. Negative responses in terms of employment equity from a few white employees could be anticipated since a number of those identifying as White indicated that the instrument does not speak to their issues, that employment equity should be addressed and that the instrument is focussed on 'other' groups. One respondent stated he feels that due to his race he does not get the same opportunities as colleagues in other race groups. One woman identifying as White added that she feels 'lonely' and more White, Coloured and other cultures should be employed to 'equal us'.

Despite affirmative action and a representative workforce being a constitutional requirement, based on the above comments, respondents indicated that fairness and equal treatment can be

achieved if people are appointed based on merit only and some indicate that employment equity is a form of reverse racism. Comments from some white respondents expressing this include: 'appoint skilled people of other groups in the executive levels of management'; 'appointing staff with skills/qualification not because of race' and that equal job opportunity entails 'no appointments based on race'. Another added that he feels hopeful that race would one day not be 'a considering factor in the workplace' and that all employees should be fairly and equally treated which entails that 'employees don't need special treatment because of their race. We are all the same'. Another respondent added that 'sometimes I am overlooked because of my race and not about the knowledge of me as a person' and that when appointments are made, experience and knowledge should be taken into consideration. One comment included that no platform will address reverse racism and that the employer should stop appointing people based on race while another added: 'Racist bias is advertised on Job-Forums' and 'Treat every employee fair and equal. Employees don't need special treatment because of their race. We are all the same'.

5.1.3 | Results of Theme 3: Respondent Expectations in Terms of Diversity Initiatives

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the following questions: 'What platforms can your employer provide to discuss perceptions of bias, discrimination, or subtle racism in your workplace?' and 'What can your employer do to better appreciate difference, history and culture in your workplace?' Responses to these questions were grouped under 'Respondent expectations of diversity initiatives' due to the overlapping of themes. Some comments come across as showing a despondency in terms of progress, placing the responsibility on a future generation who will bring change, which can be seen in the following comments: 'Racial issues are far from ending. We pray for a better generation that is, coming' and 'It will take the next generation not to focus on skin colour'. Another maintained that younger people are in a better position to engage on issues of race since 'younger ones, interact across racial lines much better than the older generations'. One respondent stated: 'Should older generation meaning senior management older than 60 years upward go to pension the organisation will change for the better'. One woman indicated that she views racism as subconscious and the way to remove it, is to start with educating children not to see colour but rather to view all people as human beings, since identifying people based on their colour 'means that deep in our hearts we are still racists no matter what'.

5.2 | Quantitative Analysis

In terms of quantitative analysis, based on the eight-factor model, the hypothesis was stated as follows: There exists a statistical association between each of the self-identified demographic groups, namely, race/population group, gender and sexual orientation identities, age groups, occupational levels, ethnicity groups (mother tongue) and disability status, and their experiences of each type of racial microaggressions. Results showed that a statistical relationship exists between

race/population group and Factor 9, Avoidance and Segregation (microinsults); Factor 7, Representation in Top or Prominent Positions in the Organisation (environmental microaggressions); and Factor 5, Assumptions of Similarity (microinsults). In terms of mother tongue/ethnicity, a statistical association exists with Factor 4, Positive Portrayal in the Organisation (environmental microaggressions); Factor 7, Representation in Top or Prominent Positions in the Organisation (environmental microaggressions); and with Factor 9, Avoidance and Segregation (microinsults). A statistical association exists between gender and Factor 2, Substandard Treatment (microinsults). Furthermore, a statistical association exists between occupation level and Factor 3, Microinvalidations and Factor 9, Avoidance and Segregation (microinsults). No statistically significant associations exist between any of the factors and age and disability status.

5.2.1 | Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Social Cohesion Construct

The analysis of the statistical relationship between racial microaggressions and social cohesion reveals that there are relationships existing between all eight identified microaggressions factors and social cohesion. The hypothesis regarding this stated that: There exists a statistical association between the experiences of different types of racial microaggressions and aspects of social cohesion, which includes the items: comfort in engaging with other colleagues; being part of a team and working towards a common goal; and feelings of belonging in the organisation.

Firstly, a separate Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted for the outcome variable, namely, social cohesion. Three positive statements were added to the REMS to explore perceptions in terms of specific aspects of social cohesion, namely, comfort in engaging with other colleagues; being part of a team and working towards a common goal; and feelings of belonging in the organisation. These are statements based on the literature review adapting the definitions of social cohesion provided by Langer et al. (2017, 322) and Lefko-Everett (2026, 12). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) were applied to verify that the data is suitable for a factor analysis. Results showed that the KMO value is above 0.5 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

is significant at $p < 0.001$, indicating that a PCA could be conducted for this factor consisting of three items. PCA revealed one eigenvalues above 1, explaining 66% of the variance after extraction. Since only one component was extracted, the solution could not be rotated. Results of the PCA are indicated in Table 1.

All three items showed factor loadings above 0.4 and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient value is above the acknowledged threshold of 0.7. Results thus reveal that these three items do form one factor, which could be labelled as social cohesion.

5.2.2 | Analysis of the Statistical Relationship Between Racial Microaggressions and Social Cohesion

The final structural equation model presents the relationships between all eight identified microaggressions factors and social cohesion as indicated in Figure 1. The stated hypothesis was: There exists a statistical association between the experiences of different types of racial microaggressions and aspects of social cohesion, which includes the items: comfort in engaging with other colleagues; being part of a team and working towards a common goal; and feelings of belonging in the organisation.

5.2.2.1 | Final Structural Model and Structural Fit Statistics. Figure 1 presents the eight independent variables (racial microaggressions) and social cohesion (dependent variable).

The model was evaluated for goodness-of-fit. Results showed adequate fit of the final model. The goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 indicate adequate fit according to the RMSEA, SRMR and normed chi-square values which were below the recommended thresholds. Although CFI, IFI and TLI do not indicate adequate fit according to the 0.9 threshold generally advocated, various authors, however, have indicated that a value above 0.8 for CFI, TLI and IFI is permissible for structural equation models (Hu and Bentler 1999, 4; Wisting et al. 2019, 3). Inconsistent fit indices have been found to be common in applications of SEM and are not diagnostic of problems in model specification or data (Lai and Green 2016,

TABLE 1 | Summary of the factor analysis for the three items (social cohesion).

Construct/Item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance	Factor loadings	Cronbach alpha
	0.595	66.04%		
	$p < 0.001$			
Social cohesion:				0.738
Q46: I felt comfortable when engaging with colleagues of all race groups			0.733	
Q47: I experienced that I am part of a team and am working with my colleagues towards a common goal			0.897	
Q48: I felt that I belong in my organisation			0.800	

Note: The bold values provided means that results reveal that the three items do form one factor which is labelled as 'social cohesion'.

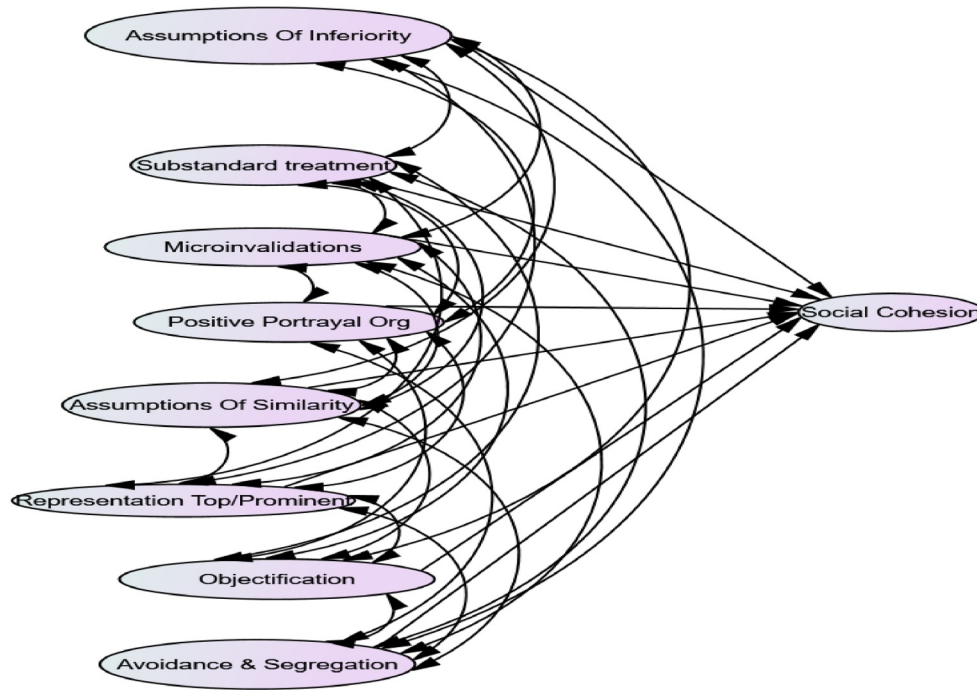


FIGURE 1 | Final structural model. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 2 | Goodness-of-fit indices for the final model.

Measure	Threshold	Fit indices of the final model
Chi-square (<i>p</i> -value)	<i>p</i> -value > 0.05	0.00
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	< 3 good; < 5 sometimes permissible	2.801
Incremental Fit Indices		
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.95 good fit; > 0.90 acceptable fit	0.844
Tucker and Lewis Index (TLI)		0.821
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)		0.846
Absolute fit measures		
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.05 good fit; 0.05 to 0.08 moderate fit; > 0.10 inadequate fit	0.075
Standardised root mean square residual (SRMR)	< 0.08 indicate adequate fit	0.0668

233). It was thus concluded that the model presented in Figure 1 indicates acceptable fit.

5.2.2.2 | Final Structural Paths Results. The following section addresses the analysis of the statistical relationship between types of racial microaggressions and social cohesion, including the structural path coefficients. Table 3 presents the standardised regression weights for the relationships between the microaggression factors and social cohesion as well as the *p*-values.

A positive regression coefficient indicates that, when the independent variable increases (racial microaggression), the dependent variable (social cohesion) will also increase. A negative coefficient indicates that if the independent variable (racial microaggression) increases, the dependent variable (social

cohesion) will decrease, thus perceptions will indicate less experience of those factors indicating social cohesion. Therefore, results reported in Table 3 show the following statistically significant relationships exist between the variable social cohesion and Factor 3 (Microinvalidations), Factor 4 (Positive Portrayal in the Organisation), Factor 8 (Objectification) and Factor 9 (Avoidance and Segregation):

- The relationship between Factor 3 (Microinvalidations) and social cohesion is positive and small (0.207), and statistically significant at the 5% significance level with *p* = 0.021.
- The relationship between Factor 4 (Positive Portrayal of ‘people of my race’ in the Organisation) and social cohesion is negative and small (−0.246) and statistically significant at the 5% significance level with *p* = 0.016. It must be taken into account that statements in this factor were reverse

TABLE 3 | Structural path coefficients: Microaggressions factors and social cohesion.

Relationships			Standardised regression weights	p-value
F1: Assumptions of inferiority (microinsults)	<---	Social cohesion	0.251	0.156
F2: Substandard treatment (microinsults)	<---	Social cohesion	0.041	0.740
F3: Microinvalidations	<---	Social cohesion	0.207	0.021
F4: Positive portrayal of 'people of my race' in the organisation (environmental microaggressions)	<---	Social cohesion	-0.246	0.016
F5: Assumptions of similarity (microinsults)	<---	Social cohesion	-0.128	0.298
F7: Representation of 'people of my race' in top or prominent positions in the organisation (environmental microaggressions)	<---	Social cohesion	-0.089	0.365
F8: Objectification (microinsults)	<---	Social cohesion	-0.284	0.098
F9: Avoidance and segregation (microinsults)	<---	Social cohesion	-0.284	0.007

Note: The shades put an emphasis on the fact that the following statistically significant relationships exist between the variable social cohesion and Factor 3 (microinvalidations), Factor 4 (positive portrayal in organisation), Factor 8 (Objectification) and Factor 9 (Avoidance and Segregation). A negative coefficient indicates that if the independent variable (racial microaggression) increases, the dependent variable (social cohesion) will decrease, thus perceptions will indicate less experience of those factors indicating social cohesion.

scored and thus indicate perceptions of 'people of my race' not positively portrayed in the organisation.

- The relationship between Factor 8 (Objectification) and social cohesion is negative and small (-0.284) and statistically significant at the 10% significance level with $p = 0.098$
- The relationship between Factor 9 (Avoidance and Segregation) is negative and moderate (-0.340), and highly significant at a 1% significance level ($p < 0.01$) with $p = 0.007$.
- Results did not show evidence of significant relationships between the other microaggression factors and social cohesion.

6 | The New Model

Based on the factors highlighted above only 8 of them and 30 items were retained and they were labelled according to theoretical and conceptual understanding. As a result, a few two-item factors emerged (factors 5, 7, 8 and 9). Although not always desirable, they are admissible (Eisinga et al. 2013). Criticism against models with factors which have only two indicators, entails that these are more susceptible to estimation problems. This criticism is especially applicable when the sample size is small (Kline 2005, 172; Kline 2016, 195). However, the sample size was not considered small in this research study and the correlation of these two-item factors were strong and above 0.56. Additionally, an EFA was conducted to restrict the number of factors to five and six. No meaningful solution emerged, and it was decided to retain the original EFA solution. Therefore, the final eight labelled factors characterising the new model are shown in the following Table 4.

In terms of the composite reliability of the newly identified factors, all factors showed values higher than 0.70, ranging from 0.725 to 0.905. The aforementioned indicates consistency reliability in terms of this measure.

7 | The South African REMS Model

A South African model of REMS may be designed based on respondents' expectations on how diversity and inclusion could be enhanced within the CTMM, particularly. The following can be considered to be essential aspects that form the model.

7.1 | Education, Training and Awareness

A majority of respondents in the open-ended responses placed a high priority on education in terms of awareness and appreciation for different cultures and languages. Training and education should be conducted by experts in the field of diversity management, with an understanding of the social construction of race, what non-racialism entails and how all forms of racism and discrimination can affect employees. The CTMM should further explore the experiences of racial microaggressions indicated by respondents, and employees should be sensitised to the specific racial microaggressions experienced in the municipality, such as Avoidance and Segregation, Objectification, Assumptions of Similarity, Microinvalidations and Environmental Microaggressions. Such education, training and awareness must take place with a clear understanding and communication to employees of the social construction of race and must be done in an environment where all are protected.

TABLE 4 | Final eight labelled factors composing the new model.

Factor	Number of items	Statements
Factor 1 Assumptions of Inferiority (microinsults)	8	Q9: A colleague assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race Q16: A colleague assumed that my work would be inferior to colleagues of other race groups Q17: A colleague acted surprised at my scholastic or professional success because of my race Q21: A colleague assumed that I would not be educated because of my race Q31: A colleague clenched his/her purse or wallet upon seeing me, because of my race Q32: A colleague assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race Q38: A colleague assumed that I am poor because of my race Q42: A colleague told me all people in my racial group look alike
Factor 2 Substandard treatment (microinsults)	5	Q1: I was ignored at work because of my race Q11: I received substandard treatment in the workplace compared to employees of other racial groups Q15: My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race Q25: A colleague was unfriendly or unwelcoming towards me because of my race Q44: My employer or a co-worker treated me differently than they treat co-workers of other races
Factor 3 Microinvalidations	5	Q27: A colleague told me that he/she 'does not see colour' Q29: A colleague asked me to teach him/her words in my mother tongue Q30: A colleague told me that he/she does not see race Q33: A colleague from a different racial group stated that there is no difference between the two of us Q39: A colleague told me that people should not think about race anymore
Factor 4 Postive portrayal in the organisation (environmental microaggressions)	4	Q19: I observed people of my race portrayed positively in workplace meetings (reversed) Q24: I observed people of my race portrayed positively in internal corporate publications (reversed) Q37: I observed people of my race portrayed positively in council meetings (reversed) Q41: I observed that people of my race are portrayed positively in my work environment (names of municipal office buildings, boardrooms, internal programmes etc.) (reversed)
Factor 5 Assumptions of similarity (microinsults)	2	Q 5: A colleague assumed that I grew up in a particular area or township because of my race Q 35: A colleague assumed that I ate foods associated with my race/culture every day

(Continues)

TABLE 4 | (Continued)

Factor	Number of items	Statements
Factor 7 Representation in top positions in the organisation (environmental microaggressions)	2	Q18: I observed that people of my race are in top positions in my department (reversed) Q 2: I observed that people of my race are in prominent positions in my workplace (reversed)
Factor 8 Objectification (microinsults)	2	Q43: A colleague objectified one of my physical features because of my race Q40: A colleague avoided eye contact with me because of my race
Factor 9 Avoidance and segregation. (microinsults)	2	Q6: A colleague avoided being in close proximity to me because of my race Q8: A colleague avoided sitting next to me in a workplace recreation area because of my race

7.2 | Appreciation for Culture

Respondents strongly indicated that different cultures should be celebrated throughout the year and more attention should be given to encouraging employees to be aware of other’s culture and specifically their language. Respondents across demographic groups frequently referred to the importance of Heritage Day. Responses show a recognition that the CTMM commemorates Heritage Day and uses internal communication to appreciate different languages. Overwhelmingly though, respondents indicate that the employer should do more to celebrate different cultures throughout the year and not only on Heritage Day; the CTMM should focus on educating employees on different cultures, increase dialogue about different cultures and must do more in terms of encouraging the use of all official languages. Acknowledgement for all the country’s official languages is highlighted by a number of respondents. While there is agreement that the employer is putting in an effort to promote different languages, there is a need for more actions to promote the use and recognition of all languages. While the above comments show the need for intervention in terms of building appreciation for different cultures and languages, numerous responses refer to the employer’s responsibility to encourage interaction, such as organising team building sessions, ensuring that people work in diverse teams, and arranging sport activities and informal social interaction, which gives the impression that respondents feel that employees do not interact enough out of own choice.

7.3 | Interaction

Positive interaction should be encouraged by leadership in the organisation, since perceptions of Avoidance and Segregation showed relationships with race/population group, mother tongue/ethnicity as well as occupation level, and revealed a negative relationship with social cohesion. Although the success of intergroup contact in improving relations between diverse groups have been questioned, a need for more interaction had been continuously highlighted by respondents in the qualitative results. Responses include that the employer should ‘Encourage engagement of different races’, and ‘the employer must resume

team building on all levels in the organisation and not only at managerial level’. One reason provided for the need for team building exercises or more interaction, is that it contributes to employees getting to know and better understand each other. One comment stated: ‘Staff meetings, through seminars, team buildings and social gatherings. Mix people of all colours to participate in the activities together. That will ease tension and gradually make us see each other as equal human beings capable of loving each other’. It is evident that responses indicate a need for, and a willingness by, employees across all race groups, to integrate in the work environment but also to socialise in less formal situations. Some responses resonate with the well-known quote by the late South African president, Nelson Mandela, who said that sport has the ‘power to unite people’ and ‘It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers’ (Mandela 2011, 378).

7.4 | Dialogue

Although dialogue around race is sensitive, employees indicated a willingness to participate in discussions, to understand each other better, and to learn what others may find Offensive. Continuous discussions, in protected spaces, may alleviate the fear and anxiety surrounding the topic and lead to a more harmonious environment where people will be able to speak up when they encounter or observe negative behaviours, without fear of repercussion or conflict. While speaking about issues of race has been shown to make people anxious (Gooden 2015; Steyn 2010), dialogue and open discussion between colleagues are referred to in the responses numerous times as a means to better understand and appreciate differences between colleagues. Respondents indicate that the CTMM has existing forums that should be utilised for diversity initiatives and discussion of perceptions of bias, discrimination, or subtle racism in the workplace and that there is a need for leadership to take responsibility for such initiatives.

Responses repeatedly included references to workshops, live chats, team building sessions and forums as platforms for discussions, for example, ‘workshops ... print media alone may not always be enough since it somehow denies persons the right of

reply'. One respondent added that racial issues are a 'communicable exercise' and people should speak more about the topic. A number of responses indicate that workshops should be encouraged by the CTMM's Change Management Department and employee wellness section. Other proposals include: 'engage in talks' and 'allow difference in culture'; 'discuss problems'; have 'racism workplace forums'; 'group workshops addressing issues surrounding racism'; 'racial acceptance workshops, team building'; 'discuss perception'; 'racial meetings'; 'discussing why someone is racist'; 'round table discussions, cultural information sessions'; 'change management forums that discuss diversity, aspects of belonging and what hampers good relations'; 'meetings where people get the opportunity to raise their concerns'; and 'informal discussion groups and office interactions' where people can learn about others' values, traditions and cultures.

7.5 | Stop Talking About It

While the responses in the previous section show a need for discussion, open dialogue, dialogue in safe spaces and anonymous reporting, the sensitivity surrounding race issues and talking about such topics led to a number of participants indicating that it is not something that should be discussed. The Microaggressions Theory regards a colour-blind approach as not recognising the racial or ethnic experiences of a person and the pretentiousness of a white person that he or she does not see race (Sue et al. 2007, 278). However, it can be noted that, in South Africa, some people regard the concept of non-racialism as a constitutional requirement as meaning 'not seeing race'. Some respondents may, therefore, have a true commitment and belief that non-racialism relates to not seeing race, which had been indicated by some respondents. Others indicated that discussions about race highlight the past and contribute to poor relations.

7.6 | Management and Leadership Responsibility

Specific reference is made by some respondents to the fact that the employer has done enough, and that the responsibility lies now with individuals to change their behaviour. However, some recognise that the responsibility for the implementation of diversity initiatives should start from the top in the organisation, and that such commitment may be lacking. One respondent posited: 'The employer must lead by example to inculcate a positive culture and to encourage dialogue on issues to avert harbouring of grudges among the work force'. Reference to the role of leadership in the CTMM who are committed, and who take diversity seriously, is made in some of the following comments: 'Racism is not acceptable, and the Employer doesn't have platforms to talk about it. It would be advisable for all managers to frequently ensure employees treat each other in a manner that one would want to be treated'. Statements from employees largely agree with Sue's (2010, 133) arguments for addressing microaggressions. Sue, for example, indicates that while Allport's contribution (Contact Theory) is still relevant in terms of identifying prejudice reduction and minimising intergroup hostility, seven conditions are most relevant in terms of microaggressions. These include intimate contact with people

who differ in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation; working cooperatively instead of competitively; sharing common goals; information sharing that is, accurate instead of exchanging misinformation and stereotypical information; equal status relationships; the importance of commitment of leadership and authority to support group harmony; and unity and interconnectedness with humanity as a whole. In this context, management and leadership in the CTMM should take responsibility for positive diversity interventions in the municipality which is shown to be lacking in both the results of this research as well as in its employee satisfaction survey. Although race is but one aspect of diversity, it is proposed that the CTMM introduces an anti-racism policy, clearly stating its stance on and commitment against any form of racism, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and bias and any form of harassment. Such a policy document should be approved by its municipal council, indicating endorsement by its political leadership. This could be a sign of commitment towards its employees. An anti-racism policy should include a complaints procedure, securing anonymity for those affected and providing for safe spaces where employees can report or discuss occurrences of micro-aggressions, be it experienced or observed, as indicated in the open-ended responses. Leadership in the CTMM, should set the example by showing commitment towards diversity initiatives. The behaviour of those in leadership positions should be such that employees can associate with their conduct and have the comfort and ease to communicate their concerns.

8 | Conclusion

Individuals can recognise microaggressions within specific settings such as the workplace. Experiences of microaggressions have negative effects on receivers and the occurrence of such may not only affect the health of receivers but could also contribute to a lack of inclusiveness and feelings of not belonging. Issues of race and perceptions of racism as well as discrimination constitute some of the most important aspects that still hamper the emergence of social cohesion within the South African society at large. Its effects can be also felt in the public sector which is supposed to play a significant role in correcting the imbalances of the past. Important to note is that the government's approach and commitments towards eliminating forms of racism and discrimination focus mostly on addressing overt behaviour or microassaults by means of legislation. Similarly, while the National Action Plan Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (NAP) had been introduced to focus on a proactive approach, its main emphasis has been on combatting overt forms of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and forms of intolerance. This plan provides specific instructions to municipalities on how to participate in the implementation of the NAP but it does not prescribe what toolkit municipalities could develop to address racism, discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. That is, because the NAP does, however, recognise subtle forms or unintentional, small, daily acts of discrimination or racism, which relates to micro-aggressions. It is in this context that the findings of this research on microaggressions within the CTMM could contribute to the implementation of the NAP in the South African public sector.

It is essential to note that issues pertaining to race and ethnicity constitute an object for a nerve break in the field of public administration as they cause anxiety and a fear for discussion. It is, however, imperative that training and education be implemented and discussions around issues of race be undertaken. Only when dialogue takes place can there be more comfort in engaging on issues that employees find offending, or alienating, in the organisation. A better understanding by all officials of what race and ethnicity entail may mitigate the anxiety surrounding this subject of discourse. Knowledge about race and how it still affects the daily lives of employees, the causes of race issues, addressing problem areas, and encouraging more engagement, may contribute to the future state of non-racialism towards which the country in general and the CTMM, in particular, should strive for. If every employee understands how they can make a change towards better relations in their environment, by being sensitive, by learning about their colleagues and identifying expectations, they may end up contributing to constant improvement of the relationship dimension in the municipality. This kind of initiatives should be undertaken with a strong commitment from those in leadership positions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Figshare at <https://researchdata.up.ac.za/>.

Practice Impact Statement

Legislation protecting individuals against forms of racism and discrimination is supported by the acknowledgement that race and racism matters in a global context. This paper provides insights into the understanding of the theories that relate to issues of race and racism in workplace and it can enlighten public managers on key variables to consider when promoting social cohesion in a public sector setting.

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