



# Evidence of compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives in South African companies

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## Abstract

Since 1994, with the advent of the first democratic elections, organisations in South Africa have embarked on a road of transformation to increase diversity in the workplace. This paper investigates the nature of diversity management initiatives and the extent to which companies in South Africa implement compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. Although literature on diversity management does exist, a paucity of research on compliance-based versus voluntary-based diversity management initiatives is noted. A survey with a web-based questionnaire was conducted among a sample of 342 employees from five TOPCO 500 South Africa's Best Managed Companies. The findings indicated that a holistic approach towards diversity management is required. In this respect, a formal diversity change strategy and programme, in addition to an employment equity plan and strategy, should be developed and implemented, and a more concerted effort is required from organisations to recruit, promote and empower women, as well as recruit and accommodate people living with disabilities.

**Keywords:** Diversity, diversity management, organisational change, women, disabilities

## Introduction

The purpose of diversity management initiatives as captured in literature is to increase cultural sensitivity and awareness (Wyatt-Nicholl & Antwi-Boasiako, 2012: 752), to reduce inequality with regard to women and minority groups (Dobbin, Schrage and Kalev 2015: 1016-1017) and to improve communication among diverse employees (Smith, Morgan, King and Peddie 2012:23). As such, diversity management requires an adjustment in the leadership practices and culture of an organisation. South African organisations are compelled by law to implement diversity management initiatives that address imbalances in the workplace created by the Apartheid political system with the goal of creating justice and fairness. In addition to compliance-based diversity management initiatives, organisations should also voluntarily initiate strategies to promote diversity in the workplace, because compliance-based diversity management initiatives prompted by law do not adequately address inclusivity or enhance an understanding or appreciation of the differences that exist among diverse people (Hays-Thomas & Bendick, 2013: 195). The implementation of diversity management programmes are both business and socially orientated (Ayoko, 2007: 109-111; Sabharwal, 2014: 6); therefore culminating in both business success and positive social outcomes including valuing diversity, fairness and justice.



An understanding of diversity management programmes in the South African business environment is crucial, especially since the Apartheid political system separated people based on gender, race and ethnicity. The Apartheid system did not promote the values of equality and social justice for all the people of South Africa as it failed to promote business principles that recognise and advance the diverse skills and talents of individuals from different backgrounds (Seeking, 2008: 1-5). In this respect, Klarsfeld, Ng and Tatli (2012: 310) and Egerova, Jiřincová, Lančarič and Savov (2013: 352) contend that progressive organisations throughout the world consider diversity management as a business, as well as a social imperative, which can be leveraged as a competitive advantage.

Wambui, Wangombe, Muthara, Kamau and Jackson (2013: 2000) assert that organisations should embrace diversity through change management processes and institutional arrangements. This includes the planning and implementation of diversity management initiatives for recruiting and retaining talented employees from all demographic groups (Konrad, 2003: 5). Research by Mkono (2010: 306) confirmed that employees who are subjected to equal treatment are more likely to stay in their jobs for a longer period. Equal treatment should provide a sense of how managers communicate and provide a conducive environment that promote good working relations in the workplace. This suggests that recruitment and selection strategies should be included as diversity initiatives for attracting and retaining diverse employees.

The main objective of the paper was to explore the extent to which compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives, based on best practices identified in a literature study, are utilised by companies in South Africa.

### **Compliance-based Diversity Management**

Compliance-based diversity management is mandated by law in order to regulate the workplace environment (Labelle, Francoeur & Lakhali, 2015: 341). In South Africa, these laws include the Constitution of the Republic of South African Act (No. 108 of 1996), the Employment Equity Act (No. 58 of 1998) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Amended Act (No. 46 of 2013).

Compliance-based diversity management aims at increasing the representation of one or more previously excluded groups and creating equality in the workplace (Manoharan, Gross & Sardeshmukh, 2014: 3). In South Africa, designated groups earmarked for affirmative action include black people, women and people living with disabilities. The Employment Equity Act, No 58 of 1998 prohibits discrimination by all employers and requires designated employers to implement affirmative action measures by means of employment equity plans (Booyesen & Nkomo in Klarsfeld, Booyesen, Ng, Roper & Tatli, 2014: 242). These plans should include strategic goals for achieving representativeness in the workplace and contain deadlines.

Compliance-based diversity management assumes either an enabling or a coercive approach. An enabling approach implies voluntary compliance with existing law, whereas a coercive approach is subject to stringent compliance and non-compliance disclosures, including government regulations and penalties, and therefore representing a more radical approach (Labelle *et al.*, 2015: 341). Despite the existence of regulations and procedural processes for reporting and monitoring compliance, it is observed that the implementation of compliance-based diversity management initiatives in South African organisations is often challenging due to time constraints, resistance to change, costs involved, disagreement with the applicable laws and a defiant attitude (May, 2004: 43).



In practice, compliance-based diversity management initiatives include the adoption of structures such as an employment equity committee to oversee the planning and implementation process (in accordance to the Employment Equity Act, No. 58 of 1998). The equity committee is tasked with formulating tangible goals and action plans and is held accountable for the implementation of plans for the employment and promotion of people from the designated groups (Krieger, Best & Eldeman, 2015: 843). According to Dobbin, Kalev and Kelly (2007: 24) diversity status evaluations, diversity training and minority networking programmes, as sanctioned within the law, often have little success in improving the status of women and minorities. The reason is that these initiatives remain exclusionary as they often target a certain sector of the population, for example, people with a specific socio-economic status.

Klarsfeld *et al.* (2012: 310) contend that although a notable number of companies that comply with the implementation of employment equity laws regard this process of compliance as diversity management, there is a difference between employment equity and diversity management. According to these authors, employment equity is an intervention by the government, whereas diversity management is implemented on a voluntary basis. This assertion provides further grounds in this study for distinguishing between compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. Even before the fall of Apartheid in 1994, Cox and Blake (1991: 46) noted that a move away from affirmative action to voluntary diversity management was required in countries such as the United States of America. Voluntary diversity management promises a multi-faceted and inclusive process, and could as such be viewed as a positive process that provides fairness and justice for all in the workplace regardless of their differences in terms of race, gender or disability. It is however clear from the recent amendment to the Employment Equity Act No 58 of 1998, that the South African government stands firm in its intention to continue with affirmative action practices. The amendments to the act provide among others an increase in fines for the contravention of the prescripts of the act. The act is known as the Employment Equity Amendment Act, No 47 of 2013.

### **Voluntary-based Diversity Management**

Voluntary-based diversity management is undertaken by organisations with a rationale for improving business performance and creating a culture that values diversity. Although voluntary-based diversity management initiatives may target specific employees for development opportunities, such as women, in essence, these initiatives remain non-discriminatory in terms of race and culture. As such, the assumption is that all employees are offered equal treatment and equal opportunities (Besler & Sezerel, 2012: 627).

A broad range of voluntary-based diversity management initiatives available or utilised in workplaces can be discovered in current research literature (Podsiadlowski, Gröscheke, Kogler, Springer & van der Zee, 2013: 161). These initiatives are implemented purposefully to meet a specific goal, which could include creating diversity awareness, diversity education, optimising employee talent, enhancing inclusion and capitalising on diversity amongst employees to create a competitive advantage. Podsiadlowski *et al.* (2013: 161) mention a number of diversity management initiatives that deal specifically with cultural diversity in the workplace, namely diversity committees, multi-cultural workgroups, advocacy groups, language classes, and intercultural diversity workshops. Cultural diversity initiatives concerned with inclusion in the workplace include ensuring equitable compensation for the entire workforce, employment security for all, equal recruitment opportunities for women and a corporate philosophy that advances diversity management (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000: 81). For the purpose of this paper, voluntary-based diversity management initiatives are defined as initiatives, other than those, which are fundamentally required by law that are freely undertaken by organisations to provide a total representative and inclusive workplace.



These initiatives include senior leaders such as CEOs, and heads of departments defining a vision and values for diversity management (Quick & Feldman, 2011: 274; Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo & Shafiq, 2012: 769). Planned approaches for implementing diversity management initiatives could be used to this end (Ramotsehoa, 1999: 43; Allen & Montgomery, 2001: 153-155; Rijamampianina & Carmichael, 2005: 111) as well as establishing structures and policies for institutionalising diversity management (Ng & Wyrick, 2011: 368; Collins, 2012: 18; Nishishiba, 2012: 59-60). Another way is to create inclusivity (Quick & Feldman, 2011: 274), offer diversity training (Bezrukova, Jen & Spell, 2012: 208) and implement employee development programmes (Rijamampianina & Carmichael, 2005; Nishishiba, 2012). People living with disabilities (Yang & Konrad, 2011: 17) and various strategies for promoting gender equity (Berry, 2013: 349), including succession planning (Beeson & Valerio, 2012: 422) should also be utilised.

### **Research design and methodology**

A positivistic research design with a quantitative research approach was employed. Companies invited to participate in the study were randomly selected from TOPCO 500 South Africa's best-managed companies. The assumption was that these best-managed companies would have adopted a more sophisticated approach to diversity management. The empirical component of the research included a sample of 342 TOPCO 500 employees from across various hierarchical levels. The participants were mostly Black (54%), followed by White (21%) and Coloured (12%), representing both male (50%) and female (50%) and between 18 and 59 years of age. The study was conducted anonymously and informed consent was sourced from the respondents after the company agreed to participate in the survey.

Existing literature on diversity management was used as the basis for the development of the data collection instrument, which took the form of a web-based questionnaire. In addition to the literature, two specific source documents, namely the Diversity Management Competency questionnaire (University of Stellenbosch, 2012) and a guideline document on diversity management best practices (U.S. State Department of Commerce, 2000) were consulted during the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. This paper focusses on two sections, namely compulsory-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives, for which a Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used. After consultation, an email with a link to the web-based questionnaire was sent to the human resource departments of the participating companies. From there, the questionnaire was emailed to employees who had access to email. A letter explaining the purpose of the study and aspects related to informed consent accompanied the questionnaire. Data emanating from the completion of the questionnaire was automatically recorded on a web-based spreadsheet.

### **Method of data analysis**

Data obtained from the study was analysed using STATISTICA version 13. Exploratory factor analysis conducted on the combined compliant-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives produced four principal factors. The factors are a formal diversity change strategy and programme, employment equity plan and strategy, recruiting, empowering and promoting women and recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities. Descriptive statistics related to these factors are presented in Table 4. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to test the strength of relationships between these factors.



## Results

Exploratory factor analyses were conducted on the 34 combined items for compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives to either confirm or reduce the current factors. Eigenvalues were identified as a measure of dimensionality, namely to determine the number of latent factors in the data. Table 1 presents the correlation matrix for combined compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives with ten loaded items.

**Table 1: Correlation matrix for items measuring Compliance-based and Voluntary-based diversity management initiatives**

Total variance explained			
Number	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.240	44.823	44.823
2	1.865	5.486	50.308
3	1.788	5.260	55.569
4	1.326	3.901	59.470
5	1.254	3.689	63.159
6	1.014	2.982	66.141
7	.932	2.743	68.884
8	.810	2.381	71.265
9	.721	2.121	73.385
10	.688	2.023	75.409

Table 1 indicates that four factors sufficiently explain the underlying correlations among items measuring compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. A percentage of variation of approximately 60% and Eigenvalues greater than one were used for extraction. Factors with loadings greater than 0.35 were regarded as significant and subsequently highlighted in the table. Three items with high loadings (> 0.35) on more than one factor were included with the factor where the loading was the highest. Subsequently, four factors were extracted from the items measuring compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. The pattern matrix resulting from the principal factor analysis performed on the 34 items is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Pattern matrix for Compliance-based and Voluntary-based diversity management initiatives**

Item No	Compliance-based Diversity Management Initiatives				Item No	Voluntary-based Diversity Management Initiatives			
	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Q2-1	-.041	.004	.656	.040	Q3_1	.418	.011	.230	.222
Q2-2	.007	-.010	.744	.001	Q3_2	.356	.002	.191	.231
Q2-3	-.023	.003	.653	-.010	Q3_3	.401	.092	.074	.331



Q2-4	.207	.150	.551	.032	Q3_4	.332	.049	.114	.342
Q2-5	-.219	.273	.264	.495	Q3_5	.123	.000	-.009	.749
Q2-6	-.173	.847	.075	.034	Q3_6	-.120	-.006	.027	.899
Q2-7	.027	.246	.479	.099	Q3_7	.007	.077	.036	.710
Q2-8	.114	.422	.242	-.028	Q3_8	.361	.568	-.194	.181
Q2-9	-.040	.719	.123	.008	Q3_9	.343	.550	-.060	.096
Q2-10	.291	.171	.307	.103	Q3_10	.501	.211	-.005	.208
Q2_11	.275	.017	.563	.046	Q3_11	.588	.038	.095	.095
Q2_12	.079	-.019	.598	.130	Q3_12	.389	.542	-.080	.044
Q2_13	.041	.107	.502	.012	Q3_13	.758	.039	.129	-.064
Q2_14	.123	.194	.279	.157	Q3_14	.692	.157	.118	-.058
Q2_15	.016	.531	.085	.123	Q3_15	.514	-.003	.396	.011
Q2_16	.332	-.092	.223	.114	Q3_16	.727	.045	-.016	.147
Q2_17	.323	.165	.216	.067					
Q2_18	.339	.020	-.003	.516					

The content of items that loaded onto each factor was compared with the original factors. Those that loaded onto different factors were scrutinised to test for commonality. Based on this process, the newly extracted factors were labelled.

The results (as presented in Table 2) reveal an interface between compliance-based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. As such, no further distinction is made between compliance-based and voluntary-base initiatives, and diversity management initiatives are referred to as a holistic whole.

The four diversity management factors that emerged included:

- Formal diversity change strategy and programme.
- Employment equity plan and strategy.
- Recruiting, empowering and promoting women.
- Recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities.

Table 3 lists the extracted factors and a summary of the items that loaded onto each factor.

**Table 3: Extracted factors with items loading on each factor**

Diversity management initiatives		
No	Factor	Summary of items loading onto factor
1	Formal diversity change strategy and programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior leaders being responsible for creating a culture appreciative of diversity</li> <li>• Formal vision statement</li> <li>• Formal change management programme with employee input</li> <li>• Formal diversity strategic plan</li> <li>• Formal mentoring plan</li> <li>• Formal diversity management training</li> </ul>



2	Employment equity plan and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive EE plan implemented</li> <li>• Honest reporting of EE profile</li> <li>• Talent development</li> <li>• Retirements and resignations earmarked for EE appointments</li> <li>• Conscious reduction of prejudice</li> <li>• EE committee monitoring progress</li> <li>• Use of BBBEE suppliers</li> </ul>
3	Recruiting, empowering and promoting women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific recruitment plans for women</li> <li>• Mentoring programmes</li> <li>• Leadership development initiatives</li> <li>• Prioritised management positions</li> <li>• Inclusion in forums and committees</li> </ul>
4	Recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific recruitment plans for people living with disabilities</li> <li>• Appointing specialised recruitment agencies</li> <li>• Identifying positions to be earmarked for people living with disabilities</li> <li>• Ensuring physical adjustments to buildings</li> <li>• Making fair adjustments to conditions of service</li> <li>• Providing technical support</li> <li>• Adjusting nature of duties</li> </ul>

Table 3 serves the purpose of operationalising the new factors, but at the same time demonstrates the nature of diversity management initiatives. The extracted factors, called diversity management initiatives, imply an integration of compliance-based and voluntary diversity management initiatives.

Table 4 presents the mean scores, standard deviations and Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the extracted diversity management factors.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics for diversity management factors**

FACTORS	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach alphas
A formal diversity change strategy and programme	344	3.26	0.91	0.92
Employment equity plan and strategy	344	3.56	0.83	0.88
Recruiting and empowering women	344	3.42	0.95	0.88
Recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities	344	3.24	0.91	0.89

The mean scores obtained for the diversity management initiatives show a tendency towards neutral and agreement scores. The highest mean score (3.56) is obtained for Employment Equity Plan and Strategy followed by Recruiting, Promoting and Empowering Women with a mean score of 3.42. The standard deviations, ranging between 0.83 and 0.95 are relatively narrow and show relative agreement amongst the respondents about these factors. The Cronbach alpha test scores vary between 0.88 and 0.92, indicating internal consistency amongst the items corresponding to each factor. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was conducted to ascertain whether relationships existed among the four extracted factors). All the correlations indicated statistical significance (i.e. being statistically significantly different from zero) with p-values less than 0.05. Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients obtained for diversity management factors.

**Table 5: Correlations among the four diversity management factors**

	Formal diversity change strategy and programme	EE plan and strategy	Recruiting, empowering and promoting women	Recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities
Formal diversity change strategy and programme	1.000			
EE plan and strategy	<b>0.712</b>	1.000		
Recruiting, empowering and promoting women	<b>0.676</b>	<b>0.647</b>	1.000	
Recruiting and accommodating people living with disabilities	<b>0.686</b>	<b>0.623</b>	<b>0.665</b>	1.000

All the correlations can be regarded as strongly positive since  $r$  is greater than 0.50 for all factors. This suggests a positive relationship between the diversity management initiative factors as depicted in Table 5.

## Results and discussion

The results revealed that though diversity management initiatives, from a theoretical perspective, are divided into compliance-based (May, 2004: 42) and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives (Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2012: 310), these initiatives are interrelated and form a coherent whole when viewed from an empirical perspective. The results reveal four main factors that constitute diversity management, namely a formal diversity change management strategy and programme, an employment equity strategy and plan, recruiting and empowering women and recruiting and accommodating employees living with disabilities. As illustrated in Table 3, each of these factors constitutes a compilation of various diversity management initiatives.

Respondents showed, a tendency towards general agreement on the items that measured a formal diversity change management and strategy and an employment equity strategy and plan. The responses are though less convincing as far as the recruitment and empowerment of women, and the recruitment and accommodation of people living with disabilities were concerned. These findings accentuate the importance of not only strategy formulation but also strategy implementation. It also demonstrates that a simple diversity management strategy, focusing on compliance, will not suffice and that organisations need to consider an integrated approach to diversity management which would encompass a formal diversity change strategy and programme; an employment equity plan and strategy; recruiting, empowering and promoting women; and accommodating people living with disabilities.

## Implication for organisations

The main implication of the results for organisations is that diversity management should be introduced as a formal change strategy and programme, with aspects of both compliance-



based and voluntary-based diversity management initiatives. Such a change strategy must be initiated and supported by senior leaders in the organisation. They also need to create and communicate desired diversity values, and a vision for an organisational culture that is inclusive and fully appreciative of diversity. Though initiated and advocated by senior leaders, the change management programme should be developed with ample employee input, and include diversity management training and mentoring. To make the change initiative successful, broad-based participation, as per Kotter's change model (Appelbaum, 2012: 767) is a requirement, which implies that managers and employees need to participate fully in the process.

## Conclusion

Companies should not only develop comprehensive employment equity plans and strategies but also ensure these plans and strategies are implemented as a matter of urgency. This requires honest reporting of the employment equity profile and a talent development strategy, which earmarks retirement and resignations as opportunities for achieving equity. The results revealed the recruitment and empowerment of women as being one of the main factors in diversity management. This means that organisations should creatively source women to fill positions and mentor them into leadership and management positions, which are proactively prioritised for attaining the desired gender equity. In addition, gender equity should be attained in terms of inclusion in forums and committees across organisations.

The results also highlighted the recruitment and accommodation of people living with disabilities as a main factor of diversity management. In this respect, specialised recruitment agencies can be appointed to identify potential employees for positions that are earmarked for people living with disabilities. Accommodating employees with disabilities should not only extend to the physical work environment but also to technology and working conditions, which could include telecommuting, flexible work hours and an adjustment to the nature of duties.

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