**South African and USA work environments: A comparative analysis of equal opportunity, diversity management and inclusion practices**

**Introduction**

South Africa (SA) and the United States of America (USA) offer numerous parallels and similarities in their perspectives regarding equal opportunity, diversity management and inclusion in the workplace. However, the operationalization of policies and practices to establish and sustain such perspectives reveal unique and distinct differences between the two countries (Booysen & Nomo, 2010; Lillevik, Combs & Wyrick, 2010).

The early history of both SA and the USA shows similar experiences. These experiences include elements of colonization by European settlers and explorers and the systematic displacement of its indigenous peoples. Additionally, the European settler colonies in both countries also rebelled against the rule of their mother land and won independence for the Europeans settlers through war. Similarly, during colonial rule and after independence both countries relegated people of colour to second class citizenship through systems of social and political norms, targeted regulations, and forced removal of indigenous people. Both countries subsequently established overarching legislation that legitimized racial segregation and violence towards blacks and other people of colour through Apartheids legislation in SA and mechanisms of slavery and Jim Crow rules/laws in the USA.

Both the USA and SA are also clustered in the Anglo cluster by the GLOBE cross cultural leadership research project (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Booysen & van Wyk, 2007). Both countries demonstrated similar patterns of social identity conflict based on reports of the Leadership Across Differences project (Gentry, Booysen, Hannum & Weber, 2010). Therefore, similar leadership practices in these two countries can be expected.

However, based on their respective societal and cultural landscape and workplace contexts, some distinct differences between and unique peculiarities in each country make for interesting differences in the outcome and implementation of equal opportunity, diversity management and inclusion practices. Historical developments, social and economic policy, and immigration patterns over the past fifty years have shaped each country differently, and thus policy and political discourse has differed as a result.

For instance one of the most profound differences between equal opportunity legislation and workplace practices between the two countries, lies in its different population demographics. In South Africa equality legislation and practices are aimed at integrating the majority people of colour group (90.3%) constituting of African Blacks (79%), Coloureds (9.8%) and Asian (1.5%) into the workplace dominated by the minority white group (9.8%) (Booysen & Nkomo (2010). In the USA, equal opportunity legislation is aimed at affording access and inclusion of racial and gender minority groups (most notably groups such as African Americans and Hispanics) into a majority white workplace (Lillevik, Combs & Wyrick, 2010).

Similar patterns of unequal representation of people of colour in the workplace are experienced by both the USA, which is 50 years past the implementation of affirmative action and equal opportunity policies and South Africa which is now 20 years into democracy.

This paper will focus on how these differences and similarities impact the cultural diversity discourse in each country and culminate in current debates and issues surrounding cultural diversity and inclusion. It will start of with a discussion of cultural diversity and an overview of the workplace equality legislative landscape in both SA and the USA. The effectiveness and outcomes of workplace equality legislative measures will then be explored as well as the consequences of non-compliance. The current debates and issues surrounding diversity and inclusion in the two countries will be unpacked under the following main themes: faultlines on the effectiveness of equality legislation, progress for racial/ethnic equality, gender equality, class inequality, uneven development and unemployment, inclusion as the new buzzword for organisational practices, skills shortage, generational differences, xenophobia and integration of minorities, LBGTQ rights and homophobia, social identity changes, and super-diversity. In the conclusion section future trends will be highlighted.

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Dr. Lize Booysen is a full professor of Leadership and Organizational behavior at Antioch University, teaching on the PhD in Leadership and Change program. Lize is an internationally recognized scholar in the field of diversity, race, gender, and leadership, an Executive Coach, and Management Consultant. She holds a doctorate in Business Leadership from the University of South Africa, as well as master’s degrees in Clinical Psychology, Research Psychology, and Criminology, all with distinction. Dr. Booysen is also adjunct faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina, and USA and has been involved in the 12-nation Leadership Across Differences (LAD) research project steered by the CCL. She participated in the GLOBE 65-nations research project on leadership, national culture and organizational practices, steered by Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania. Lize is the current past Chair of the Business Leadership Member Interest Group of the International Leadership Association (ILA).

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