UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Experiences of employees with disabilities in terms of accommodation within the workplace as delineated in the Employment Equity Act, no.55 of 1998: A qualitative study

By

Sikhona S. L. Phakathi

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Social Science (Industrial Psychology)

In the School of Applied Human Science, College of Humanities,

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

Supervisor: Mr Dean Isaacs

December 2015

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science (Industrial Psychology) in the faculty of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

Sikhona S.L. Phakathi

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December 2015

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my wonderful parents (Mr Caiphus M. Phakathi and Mrs Thulisile P. Phakathi) who have always been my main pillars of strength. I am extremely grateful for your prayers, unconditional love, endless support and motivation. I am honoured to have you as my parents, you are simply the best. I will forever remain grateful to you for always doing your best to ensure that I succeed in my academic journey and in everything I do. Thank you for always believing in me and granting me the opportunity to pursue my dreams. I promise that I will continue to make you proud. I pray that God continues to bless and protect you.

ABSTRACT

In the democratic South Africa, legislation such as the *Employment Equity Act* has been put in place to promote the rights of people with disabilities and enjoins employers to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. According to the *Employment Equity Act*, people with disabilities are entitled to equal opportunities in the labour market and both employers and employees with disabilities have a role to play in ensuring that reasonable accommodation is made available in the workplace. This study explored the experiences of employees with disabilities in relation to the issue of reasonable accommodation in the workplace in the South African context. The *Social Model of Disability* was applied in this study as framework upon which an understanding of disability as it obtains in the workplace could be built. The study also sought to establish how different forms of barriers influence the experiences of employees with disabilities.

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study and this took the form of in-depth and semi-structured interviews. This study was conducted amongst employees with disabilities from two different organisations and the respondents were from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The data collected in this study was analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. The findings of this study indicate that factors relating to reasonable accommodation, legislation on disability in the workplace, financial constraints, challenges, adjustment and adaptation strategies, opportunities, inclusion, workplace culture and organisational support all have an influence on the experiences of workers with disabilities. Thus, based on the findings of the study, it is argued that employers need to probe further into the issue of workplace reasonable accommodation with the view of attaining equity in the workplace.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

South Africa is in the 21sst year of democracy and it has successfully implemented certain laws and legislation that promote equality. Considerable effort has been invested in the preparation of numerous Codes, Guidelines and White Papers dealing with disability. Chief among these are: the *Labour Relations Act, no. 66 of 1995* and the *Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998* which make provision for employment equity and thus provide for matters concerning, mainly, the promotion of the constitutional right of equality and the exercise of true democracy; the elimination of unfair discrimination in employment as well as to achieve a diverse workforce broadly representative of its people. The *Code of Good Practice* on disability is also important because it is a guide for employers and employees on the main aspects of promoting fair treatment and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, as required by the *Employment Equity Act* (Jordaan, Maserumule & Stelzner, 2001). Notably, therefore, the rights of persons with disabilities are protected by the *1996 Constitution of South Africa*.

According to the *Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998*, henceforth EEA, disabilities apply to people who have long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into or advancement in employment. Moreover, the EEA requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to workers living with disabilities. According to the EEA, reasonable accommodation refers to "any modification or adjustment to a job or to the working environment that will enable a person from a designated group to have access to or participate or advance in employment". According to Mitra (2008), employers are expected to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, and to make the process of hiring, training and placement accessible to persons with disabilities. In South Africa, government departments and state bodies are bound by statutory provisions to have at least 2% of the people with disabilities as part of their workforce (Mitra, 2008).

Although legislation is put in place to protect the rights of people with disabilities, in reality they still remain marginalised, especially in the workplace. The evidential information available in this

regard indicates that the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market is low. Therefore, it is very important that organisations do something to address this issue and ensure that people with disabilities are presented with positive working experiences (Lee, 1997). When compared to international standards, the percentage of people with disabilities who are employed in South Africa is very low. According to research findings, 5% to 12% of South Africans are living with disabilities. In South Africa, therefore, the first legal requirement is workplace accessibility for all employees.

Legal requirements on the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities have caused organisations to put some effort to make workplaces accessible to people with disabilities and to provide any forms of necessary assistance, including assistive technological devices to help people with disabilities perform their essential duties (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrel & Ratz, 1997). As emphasised in the EEA, disability is a natural part of life and people with disabilities are entitled to equal opportunities in the labour market and have rights, such as, the right to be reasonably accommodated in the workplace.

There are a variety of reasons accounting for the provision of reasonable accommodations. However, the most common rationales for making reasonable accommodations are generated by these three factors: legal mandates, business or economic considerations and social/moral mandates (Cleveland et al., 1997). In abiding by the law and creating a good image in society, organisations develop a positive employee-oriented organisational climate, and acceptable workforce demographics, which has positive consequences for the organisation (Cleveland et al., 1997). The argument advanced by Cleveland et al above is corroborated by Newman's (2013) assertion that for organisations, employing persons with disabilities is both a right and good thing to do, especially with the implementation of new legislation.

By providing reasonable accommodations, organisations do benefit in the sense that individuals perform their essential tasks better. As a result, productivity of good quality increases as competent employees are retained in the organisation and this has positive consequences for the organisation (Cleveland et al., 1997). Another way in which organisations can benefit by including employees with disabilities in their workforce is through attaining *Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment* (BBBEE) points. As part of the legislation implemented in the post-apartheid South

Africa to promote the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market, BBBEE is centred on the rewarding of businesses that comply with it through BBBEE points. Businesses are rated according to their BBBEE points, meaning that, gaining higher points places a business at an advantage and this may create more opportunities for the business (Newman, 2013). As asserted by Cleveland et al. (1997), the provision of accommodation might be seen as a means of equitably rewarding employees with disabilities that are capable of making significant contributions towards the organisation's success. It is important, however, to note that with respect to employees with disabilities, legal obligations remain the most important rationale for organisations to provide reasonable accommodation (Cleveland et al., 1997).

Both in South Africa and worldwide, people with disabilities are part of a significant minority group within society. This fact notwithstanding, they continue to face different forms of social and economic exclusion (Reyneke & Oosthuizen, 2004). In this regard, Ngwenya (2004) argues that as a previously marginalised group, the socio-economic position of people with disabilities in South Africa is one of high levels of inequality and poverty. Moreover, in South Africa, other extreme factors that affect people with disabilities are unemployment and lack of access to vocational training and schools (cf. Ngwenya, 2004).

1.2 Rationale for the study

There is a huge gap in literature on the experiences of employees with disabilities, especially in the South African context. Additionally, there is also lack of research on the topic of experiences of employees with regards to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. This is attested to by scholars such as, Schur, Kruse, Blasi and Blanck (2009), in their argument that little research has been conducted that focuses specifically on the experiences of employees living with disabilities in the workplace. It is noted, though, that most of the research conducted focuses mainly on the levels of employment. Other important factors concerning employees with disabilities, such as reasonable accommodation, are widely ignored. It is for this reason, therefore, that this study sought to investigate the experiences of employees with disabilities in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace with specific reference to the South African context. It is hoped

that the findings of this study will contribute towards bridging the gap that currently exists in the literature on the topic in question.

Notably, research has established that people with disabilities are more likely to be treated differently in the workplace. In South Africa and with specific reference to workplaces, built environment, education systems, communication and transport systems, recreational amenities and so forth, there is blatant exclusion of individuals with disabilities. Arguably, this has the resultant effect of perpetuating social exclusion and marginalisation of people with disabilities (Ngwenya, 2004). It is further argued by Van Reenen (2002) that people with disabilities are often denied access to existing social services as well as economic support. This is mainly due to physical barriers that exist among which is lack of wheelchair-friendly ramps to buildings.

Van Reenen (2002) argues that employers often fail in their employment equity plans to take into account consideration of the special needs of employees with disabilities, such as special technological assistive devices to assist employees with visual impairments. Additionally, Van Reenen (2002) asserts that in South Africa, not enough emphasis has been placed on the needs of employees with disabilities and the provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace as provided for by the employment equity plans. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this study sought to explore in depth the validity of the assertions pronounced regarding the treatment meted out to individuals living with disability especially in the workplace.

Thus, it is apparent from the above discussion that although legislation, such as the EEA has been put in place, employees with disabilities are still not reasonably accommodated within workplaces. It is for this reason, therefore, that this study also sought to explore the experiences of employees in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace with specific reference to the South African context.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the study

The general aim of the study was to explore the experiences of employees with disabilities in terms of accommodation within the workplace as delineated in the *Employment Equity Act*.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study were:

(a) To examine the experiences and adjustment patterns of disabled employees in the workplace.
(b) To examine the experiences of employees with disabilities in relation to reasonable accommodation in their workplaces.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

(a) What are the general experiences of people with disabilities in the workplace?
(b) How do employees with disabilities experience the process of accommodation in the workplace?
(c) What are the disabled employees' experiences in terms of employment opportunities, obstacles and general organisational support and inclusion?

<center>**Chapter Two**</center>

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

> In practice, companies can do a great deal to accommodate disabled employees and benefit from their skills and abilities while meeting legislative targets (Engelbrecht, 2010, p. 25).

2.1 Reasonable Accommodation

It is important for organisations to make workplaces accessible to employees with disabilities. People with disabilities deserve to be given a chance to contribute their skills to the South African workforce by being provided with reasonable accommodation and also without being discriminated against on the basis of their disability (Mitra, 2008). In South Africa, the physical environment, such as infrastructure, machinery and equipment have been found to be major barriers which prevent the employment of persons with disabilities (Snyder, Cramichael, Blackwell, Cleveland & Thornton, 2011). The low levels of the provision of reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities contribute not only to their continued lack of independence in society but also to their continued marginalisation (Van Staden, 2011). Maramoagae (2012) argues that the state's effort to implement progressive measures to ensure the attainment of equality within the workplace for people with disabilities has faced many challenges. Chief among these is the lack of reasonable accommodation measures in South African workplaces. This view is corroborated by Van Steden's (2011) argument that some of the main reasons why employees with disabilities are not reasonably accommodated are that organisations do not have policies and guidelines put in place to guide them with regard to the provision of reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities. This is best exemplified by some offices or workplace buildings and equipment which are not designed to be user friendly to people with disabilities. Therefore, disabled people, if employed, might not work effectively due to this constraint. It is for this reason, therefore, that legislation regarding reasonable accommodation is fully discussed later in this chapter.

In a study by Gida and Ortlepp (2007) in their investigation of human resource management practices in the Financial Mail's top one hundred organisations in South Africa, respondent

employers indicated that inaccessible facilities and public transport prevented them from hiring persons with disabilities. Furthermore, research within the Bank Seta, which is a statutory body implemented to grow and support the level of current and future skills needed in the sector of banking, indicated that the buildings are not appropriately accessible to persons with disabilities (Snyder et al., 2011). Contrary to the findings of Snyder et al, a study conducted by Hosey and Mathis (2007) suggest that employing persons with disabilities can increase the company's profitability levels due to the fact that there is a great benefit accruing from employing persons with disabilities because the company scores equity points. It is further argued that when opportunities and accommodation are provided, persons with disabilities can make valuable contributions to every workplace through their skills and abilities and thus make a positive contribution to the economy of our society.

Similarly, Barnes and Mercer (2005) assert that the way in which work is organised as well as the workplace design are critical when it comes to the issue of reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. Furthermore, Crampton and Hodge (2003) aver that reasonable accommodation is one of the important ways of ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to perform their 'essential duties'. Arguably, accommodation enables the disabled worker to carry out his/her duties to sustain performance standards or to continue a career with the organisation. In essence, the employer is put in the position of granting (or failing to grant) conditions that might allow the disabled worker to maintain his or her job (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell & Ratz, 1997).

It is important to note, though, that employees also have responsibilities regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation. When employers have made provision for accommodation which is reasonable, it is the employees' responsibility to ensure that they perform their duties and adhere to the standards of conduct as required in the workplace (Crampton & Hodge, 2003). It is also the responsibility of the employees to inform the employer about their need and entitlement to reasonable accommodation. Cleveland et al. (1997) is in agreement with this view and thus argues that it is critical to take into account the extent to which an individual feels entitled to accommodation as this might affect the way they react to the final accommodation. Furthermore, employees also need to ensure that they request accommodation as soon as the need for such arises and should not wait until major performance problems occur (Crampton & Hodge, 2003). In their study, Cleveland et al. (1997) argue that the process of providing reasonable accommodation can

be initiated by the employer or the employee. Notably, research indicates that there are a few jobs that a qualified individual cannot perform when appropriately accommodated (Jones, 1997).

Possible factors must be considered to determine whether a specific accommodation policy can be implemented or not. These factors include the size of the employer's organisation, financial costs involved in the accommodation, possible safety risks as well as the benefits obtained by a disabled employee (Modise, Olivier & Miruka, 2014). It can, therefore, be said that these factors continue to prevail and this derives from the fact that studies conducted many years ago, such as that of Lee (1997), also indicated that the employer's perceptions regarding the possibility of accommodation will be influenced by their perceived cost of accommodation. Additionally, perceived disruption by either the accommodation or the employee him or herself, and potential co-worker reactions to the accommodation of the employee with a disability are critical factors to be given due consideration. MacDonald-Wilson, Rogers, Massaro, Lyass and Crean (2002) in their study on workplace reasonable accommodation conducted in different organizations in America on 191 employees with disabilities found that most of the time the need for accommodations was identified and implemented during the process of hiring and in some cases they were implemented within the first two months of employment of an employee with a disability.

Christianson (2012) asserts that the most appropriate or the best accommodation is one that respects the dignity of the individual with a disability, meets their needs, ensures confidentiality and also promotes their full participation and integration. Many researchers today, when looking into reasonable accommodation research, still refer to the work of Kierman and Schalock (1989) as the basis of their studies. In their work, Kierman and Schalock (1989) identified five common types of accommodations as suggested by disability specialists. These are: working areas, work environment, work station changes, modification of work activities and job restructuring. Work environment in relation to reasonable accommodation may include looking into factors such as noise, temperature, pollution controls, reduction of distractions and making rest areas available. Work station changes may include looking into factors such as lighting, adjusting tables and desks and moving work areas in order to benefit employees that use wheelchairs. Job restructuring in relation to reasonable accommodation may include task reassignment and work activities modification may involve adjusting working hours and making flexible rest breaks for employees.

More recent studies on this topic also add to the above actions. Taggart (2009) avers that some forms of reasonable accommodations include the modifications of workplaces, provision of alternative work tools and offering individual assistance in order to ensure that barriers are removed and also to improve the employees' ability to make effective and equitable contribution to the organisation. However, in the Journal of Occupational Health, Risk Management (2006), building up from previous knowledge, new additional examples of reasonable accommodations are discussed. It is asserted that examples of changes or adjustments that can be done to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities in the workplace are: reorganising work stations, adapting existing facilities in order to make them more accessible, adjusting leave and working time, job restructuring so that functions that are non-essential are reassigned, providing specialised support, supervision as well as training and acquiring new equipment or adapting existing equipment such as computer software and hardware (Journal of Occupational Health, Risk Management, 2006). Some of these reasonable accommodation measures are similar to those of other countries, such as America. For example, the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) also put 'job restructuring' as a form of reasonable accommodation which considers the amendment of the requirements of a job position in order to ensure that an individual with a disability will be able to perform their essential functions (Pine, 1999). It is also important to note that the timing of accommodation depends on the situation. As indicated earlier on Accommodation can be provided during the hiring process or after the employee has been appointed into the organisation (Cleveland et al., 1997).

It bears repeating Modise, Olivier and Miruka's (2014) argument that it is important that if an employer fails to reasonably accommodate the needs of a disabled individual or states that the accommodation is too costly, then necessary measures must be implemented to amend the situation. In addition, possible factors must be considered to determine whether a specific accommodation policy can be implemented or not. These factors, as indicated earlier on, include the size of the employer's organisation, financial costs involved in the accommodation, possible safety risks as well as the benefits obtained by a disabled employee (Modise et al., 2014). In addition, the findings of a study conducted by Lee (1997) indicate that the company size has a substantial effect on the attitudes of employers with regards to accommodating employees with disabilities. It was established that representatives from large firms were more likely to believe that most disabilities could be accommodated in the workplace. This could be due to the fact that larger companies have greater resources than small companies.

Employers should do thorough research regarding the effects of proposed accommodations and should not rush to assume that an accommodation is an 'undue hardship' before doing a proper investigation and also look at alternatives (Crampton & Hodge, 2003). The EEA describes undue hardship as: an action that requires considerable or substantial expense or difficulty, putting into consideration among other things, the extent to which the accommodation would disrupt the business' operation as well as its effectiveness. If the provision of reasonable accommodation does not pose any safety threat or 'undue hardship', it is essential for employers to provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities in order for them to be able to perform their jobs (Crampton & Hodge, 2003). The EEA also indicates that reasonable accommodation should not impose an 'unjustifiable hardship'. It is important to note that employers can choose alternatives for reasonable accommodation provided that these are equally effective. Less costly accommodation could be made if they could be effective enough (Crampton & Hodge, 2003).

Dissatisfaction over the poor employment experience of people with disabilities in South Africa as well as in other countries has led to the implementation of major legislation which is aimed at radically increasing their market work through mandated job accommodation (Burkhauser, Bultler & Kim, 1995). According to Jones (1997), through the implementation of strategies for overcoming barriers and improving the qualities of opportunities for people living with disabilities, such as reasonable accommodation, disabled people might fully utilise their potential. Thus, reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities will not only benefit the individual, but also the organisation. In the next section, the South African legislation in relation to workplace reasonable accommodation will be discussed in detail.

2.2 Legislation

In the past, vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people did not have rights to voice their opinions and make contributions to issues that affect them, such as the issue of disability. However, in the post-apartheid South Africa, this has changed as there has been an implementation of policy and legislation such as the EEA and the *Code of Good Practice on Disability* which promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities. Employers now have a legal obligation to provide accommodation to people with disabilities. According to Cleveland et al. (1997), the presence of

legal requirements to provide accommodation for disabled persons has changed the thinking about accommodation from the focus on average or above average workers to a focus on workers with special needs such as workers with disabilities and also from the goal of maximising performance to that of meeting minimum essential job functions.

According to the EEA, people with disabilities constitute are a designated group that should be affirmed in the employment sector. In South Africa, however, it has been established that the employment of persons with disabilities is lower than that of other designated groups as established by the EEA (Van Staden, 2011). Hurling (2008) avers that workplaces are mostly designed to suit people who are able-bodied. This contributes to the lack of reasonable accommodation which Van Staden (2011) considers as one of the constraints that individuals with disabilities face because it limits their participation or prevents them from participating on an equal basis with other people in the workplace.

According to the *Code of Good Practice on Disability*, the main purpose of reasonably accommodating employees with disabilities is to reduce the impact of the impairment of an individual's capacity to fulfil the primary functions of a job. In essence, the main aspect of the Code of Good Practice on Disability focuses on how to modify the work situation in order to bridge any gap between the individual's ability and job requirements or work environments. The *Code of Good Practice on Disability* gives direction with numerous examples that cover the concept of reasonable accommodation. Such examples include the adaptation of already existing facilities to make them accessible to employees with disabilities; installation of computer software and hardware that will be user friendly to employees with disabilities; changing training and assessment systems and materials to accommodate employees with disabilities; re-organising work stations; restructuring jobs; adjusting leave and working times of employees with disabilities; providing sign language interpreters, readers and specialised supervision and training and support for employees with disabilities (*Code of Good Practice on Key Aspects of Disability in the Workplace*, 1998). Examples of reasonable accommodation are not limited to the ones mentioned above. Notably, a particular type of accommodation depends on the individual and the nature and degree of impairment and the effect it has not only on the person but also on the job and work environment. Each type of disability impacts on one's ability to perform certain tasks and activities in a unique way (Van Staden, 2011). The code also provides that as a form of reasonable

accommodation, an employer, based on the nature of the disability may be required to adapt the manner in which work performance is measured or evaluated for an employee with a disability. Reasonable accommodation can either be permanent or temporary depending on the extent as well as the nature of the disability (*Code of Good Practice on Key Aspects of Disability in the Workplace*, 1998). Thus, the code helps create awareness of the positive and valuable contributions that employees with disabilities can make in the workplace using their skills.

Marumoagae (2012) argues stated that the code ensures that the employer is not entitled to employing a qualified applicant or an employee with a disability if this would impose an 'unjustifiable hardship' on the business of the employer. As alluded to earlier on, the code explains 'unjustifiable hardship' as an action that requires substantial and significant expense or difficulty and such action would largely harm the viability and the operation of the organisation/business (*Code of Good Practice on Key Aspects of Disability in the Workplace*, 1998). Furthermore, Marumoagae (2012) asserts that the provision of reasonable accommodation also depends on the employer's awareness of the job applicant's or employee's disability or impairment. The *Code of Good Practice on Disability* clearly outlines this by providing stating that the obligation to reasonably accommodate an employee or applicant may arise when they voluntarily disclose a disability related need for accommodation or when this need is self-evident to the employer. Hurling (2008) emphasises the notion that reasonable accommodation should be made available even during the interview process so as to ensure that the disabled job applicant is given a reasonable as well as fair opportunity in the application and selection processes. Employers should align their approach to disability with the *Code of Good Practice* and acknowledge that people with disabilities have rights.

The *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy*, which was formulated in 1997 (by the post-apartheid government) provides a framework for integrating disability related issues into government programmes and strategies so as to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access their rights and participate fully in society (Biccard, 2002). According to this paper, the full participation of all citizens in the economy will only exist if people with disabilities are included in the process (Sing & Govender, 2007). The *White Paper* represents a shift in the South African government's thinking on the issue of disability and this is in line with international standards and developments on the issue of disability. This strategy recognises that individuals with disabilities

are mostly excluded from mainstream society by both attitudinal and physical barriers. This strategy is also in support of the social model of disability (Sing & Govender, 2007). In addition, this strategy is also in line with the *Disability Charter of South Africa* which accentuates the importance of granting people with disabilities their rights to employment and also their right to be reasonably accommodated.

The creation of a *Workplace Accommodation Policy* is also an essential step towards ensuring that employees with disabilities are reasonably accommodated in the workplace (Taggart, 2009). Furthermore, this also ensures that the rights of people with disabilities are acknowledged and that workplace accommodations are funded properly within the organisation. In his report on Innovative Workplace Accommodation at BMO Financial Group, Taggard (2009) remarked that the review of the company's *Workplace Accommodation Policy* assisted the company in realising that there was not enough support given to employees with disability as well as to the manager. As a result, the company saw the negative implications of this and took a decision to enhance their policy by implementing innovative ways to provide better support for employees with disabilities so as to increase work effectiveness and productivity. The company also created the role of a Workplace Accommodation Advisor, who works with both the manager and employees to make sure that workplace accommodation needs are successfully attended to.

There is a problem, however, in that the EEA does not provide clear guidelines on how people with disabilities should be reasonably accommodated. This then gives employers power to decide on how they should accommodate people with disabilities. Moreover, the act does not clearly stipulate if there are any strict measures or penalties to be meted out to employers who fail to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities (Modise et al., 2014). In addition, there is also a growing concern that the concept of reasonable accommodation in relation to disability has not yet been adequately tested in the South African labour courts and, therefore, it still remains unclear as to what it entails precisely (Marumoagae, 2012). However, the disability code does provide some guidance by listing some examples which have already been mentioned above which involve reasonable accommodation.

It is clear that the need to provide accommodation for individuals with disabilities in the labour market is a challenge and even a problem to some employers (Modise et al., 2014). The South African jurisprudence has been largely criticised for not offering much guidance with regard to

reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities (Marumoagae, 2012). Scholars such as Jaarsveld (2002) posit that South Africa can benefit from other countries' interpretation of the concept of 'reasonable accommodation'. However, it is very important that the South African courts or legislation remain cautious when considering foreign jurisprudence. In essence, South Africa should not fall into the trap of applying or adapting foreign jurisprudence in the country as it is. Instead, the South African courts ought to develop a model of reasonable accommodation that will take into account the South African context (Marumoagae, 2012).

2.3 The South African Context

South Africa is a highly diverse country and people with disabilities form part of the South Africa population. In the South African context, the perception of disability is magnified by political as well as historical factors (Marsay, 2014). In South Africa, there is no accurate report on the number of people living with disabilities. One of the factors that contributes to this lack of accurate information is the fact that some individuals are unable to recognise, acknowledge and report that they have a disability (Marsay, 2014). This may be due to fear of stigmatisation.

There is often a contradiction between the figures received from *Statistics South Africa* and those received from particular disability organisations in the country (Marsay, 2014). This, therefore, suggests that people with disabilities are present but they are not accurately represented in numbers, due to the fact that they do not disclose their disability or health status (Marsay, 2014). Van Deventer (2011) also supports this view by positing that statistical reports on people with disabilities in the country vary from 2% to 12%. He also asserts that there is discrepancy between the organisations that present statistics on employees with disabilities. The government has set a target to employ a minimum of 3% of people living with disabilities. However, this goal has not been achieved and reports indicate that the figure of employed individuals with disabilities went down from approximately 1% in 2009 to 0.5% in 2011 (Van Deventer, 2011).

However, in the *13th Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report*, 2012-2013, it is reported that only 1.4% of the population living with disabilities is employed. This causes a great concern as the *Association of Persons with Disabilities* in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, estimates that 50% of the population of people with disabilities (in terms of both age and ability) is employable. This

means that 2.5% of persons living with disabilities should be employed (Newman, 2013). This suggests that the country still has a long way to go as far as addressing the issue of the inclusion of people with disabilities is concerned. The 13th report reflects on South Africa's status of employment from the period of 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. According to the report, out of the total number of 6 153 34 number of employees, as reported by employers in 2012, individuals with disabilities only accounted for 84 481 or 1.4%. (Newman, 2013). Furthermore, this report also indicates that there has been very little increase in the representation of people with disabilities in the workplace. The report supports this by asserting that there has only been a 0.4% increase from 1% in the year 2002 to only 1.4% in the year 2012 (Newman, 2013). However, this also suggests that there is hope that things will get better as time goes by and that more progress is yet to be seen.

Notably, "Nothing about us without us" is a slogan adopted by *Disabled People South Africa* (DPSA). In analysing this slogan, it can be argued that it also means that 'People with disabilities are their own best Advocates'. According to Marsay (2014), participation of people living with disabilities is critical and it has very important implications for the way in which research on disability is conducted. This means that there is a great need for collaboration between state institutions, professionals involved in disability issues and those that assist persons with disabilities, civil society and people with disabilities (Marsay, 2014).

Physical barriers, amongst others, such as cultural and social barriers, are the most common kinds of barriers that continue to prevent disabled people from exercising their constitutional rights to equality, human dignity and freedom (Marumoagae, 2012). Disabled people can lead independent and productive lives provided that they have access to resources, environments, technical aids and opportunities that allow them responsibility, self-sufficiency, as well as independence and dignity (Marumoagae, 2012). A physical environment that is safe and functional is critical to employee productivity. In South Africa, private and public buildings do not have the necessary or appropriate physical infrastructure; such as appropriate toilet facilities, ramps for wheelchairs, service counters of an appropriate height, lifts in workplaces with more than one floor and other forms of physical infrastructure that is required by people with disabilities, including employees with disabilities (Hurling, 2008). Notably, physical barriers may also lead to inadequate training for employees with disabilities. This might happen if training programmes do not reasonably accommodate nor

meet the needs of employees with disabilities, for example, if learning materials and venues are inappropriate for people with disabilities (Hurling, 2008).

2.4 Other related factors

While employees with disabilities may be concerned, as non-disabled employees, with general issues affecting all employees, for some, issues arising from their disability may be their foremost concern (Balser, 2007). This view is corroborated by the research study conducted by Kim (2007) in it is posited that employees without disabilities, employees with disabilities appear to be linked to racial or gender stereotypical roles and occupations. The presence of negative stereotypes also affects the daily lives of employees with disabilities resulting to a variety of harmful experiences in the workplace, such as unfair treatment in formal decision-making regarding many employment issues (Snyder et al., 2010). Coleman, Skyes and Groom (2013) found that people with disabilities experience many barriers and stereotypes in the workplace. These include discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment.

According to Fillary and Pernice (2005), previous research has also indicated that employees with disabilities are less included in the work culture as compared to employees without disabilities. This is most likely to lead to negative experiences in the workplace for employees with disabilities because organisational culture plays a significant role in issues concerning the inclusion and acceptance of employees with disabilities in the workplace. This claim is attested to by the study conducted by Butterworth, Hagner, Helm and Whelley (2000) which posits that one of the main things that have been of great benefit to co-worker acceptance of employees with disabilities include organisational culture and support. Artksey (2003) also found that support for employees with disabilities promotes their inclusion in the workplace and improves their experiences. Schur et al. (2005) found that corporate culture can create different kinds of barriers for job applicants and employees with disabilities. These barriers include behavioural, physical and attitudinal barriers. It is argued that these barriers also hinder their opportunities for employment, promotion, as well as their overall wellbeing. Leão and Silva (2012) found that barriers that exist in the workplace hinder the professional growth of employees with disabilities. Gold, Orie, Forbian and Wewiorski (2012) found that the superior or manager has an important role to play in ensuring that

such barriers are removed and employees with disabilities are provided with support and reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Matt (2008) found that some nurses with disabilities struggle with environmental barriers while others do not and links this to the workplace support and understanding that managers give to the nurses.

Moreover, with regards to employment, education, income and housing, individuals with disabilities are far worse off than people without disabilities (Kim, 2007). Scholars, such as Schriner (2001) are in agreement with this view and thus also aver that people living with disabilities fall among the most economically disadvantaged groups in society, both internationally and locally. This view is further supported by the study conducted by Eide and Ingstad (2013) which found that disability is linked with lower levels of living and that there are significant gaps in services for people with disabilities. Engelbretch (2010) from Alexander Forbes Health, argues that employees with disability are often placed in low-status jobs and they also experience unemployment. Schriner (2001) also agrees with this claim by asserting that people with disabilities are generally likely to be employed in unskilled or manual labour which is low-paying in contrast to management and professional positions.

According to Engelbrecht (2010) some of the main causes for the discrimination of people with disabilities in employment and in society at large are stereotypes, ignorance and fear. The inaccessibility of workplaces and the way trainings are often structured are sometimes inappropriate for people with disabilities. Scholars, such as Van Staden (2011) argue that in South Africa, the rights of persons with disabilities and their unique circumstances are often not acknowledged and that this results in the unfair treatment and lack of provision of reasonable accommodation for them. Barnes and Mecer (2005) through their research also posit that the stigmatisation and discrimination that people with disabilities face in the labour market is mostly due to the common assumption that they are less productive by virtue of them having a disability. In their study on the right to equal treatment and opportunity for people with disabilities in Slovenia, Uršic and Vidma (2004), found that employers monitored the job performance results achieved by employees with disabilities and established that the job performance of half of their employees with disabilities is below in comparison to that of other workers with a lower percentage of employees with disabilities achieving the same job performance results as other workers. Kim (2007) also avers that people with disabilities are not provided with adequate opportunities in

education, experience and performance which are regarded as the main determinants of successful career building in both the private and public sector.

In post-apartheid South Africa, a policy of inclusion in education has been adopted. This allows for the inclusion of learners with special needs into 'mainstream schooling' (Marsay, 2014). Although this policy is in place, data from 22 of the 23 public universities in the country indicate that 5 807 students with disabilities were registered in institutions of higher learning in 2011, accounting for only 1% of the total of registered students (*Department of Higher Education and Training*, 2014). Marsay (2014) argues that this decrease in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in tertiary institutions could be attributed to the shortage of opportunities for training and education. However, the Minister of *Higher Education and Training*, Dr. Blade Nzimande, in a speech he made at the launch of the *White Paper on Post-school Education and Training*, which took place in January 2014, posited that this issue will be addressed by having more students with disabilities granted the opportunity to study. It is notable, however, that the *Government Services SETA* report of 2004 reported that a growing number of people with disabilities are now able to pursue careers of their choice due to the fact that technological advances have removed some obstacles that prevent them from fulfilling their career goals.

Very little research has been done on the experiences of employees with disabilities in relation to reasonable accommodation within the workplace. For this study, insights on the topic under discussion have also been drawn from the study conducted by the *Australian Department of Higher Education and Training* in 2005. This was a case study that documented the experiences of workers with disabilities and their manager. Some of the major themes that were identified in this case study are adjustment issues and experiences of management and organisational support. The study also found that there is a need for an increase in disability awareness in the workplace. Some of the respondents remarked that the Department did provide accommodation by installing adaptive computer hardware and software, appropriately placing work stations, ensuring that there is reasonable noise and lighting levels, giving employees with disabilities equal access to promotions, equipment and documents etcetera. However, a smaller number of the respondents raised the concern that they were scared to voice out their grievances or complaints because they would be perceived negatively or be discriminated against. The respondents indicated that the support from the managers and the co-workers is remarkable. Removal of all kinds of barriers that

exist for people with disabilities in the Department and disability management trainings as well as overall diversity management trainings are some of the main recommendations and improvements required that were raised by the respondents.

'Doing Disability at the Bank' is a study conducted by Church, Frazee, Panitch, Luciani and Bowman (2007) and it focused on the experiences of employees with disabilities in the financial sector. This study found that the current generation of employees with disabilities has high expectations for technical assistance and, therefore, find it really frustrating to wait for workplace accommodations. It is also interesting to note that the study found that some employees with disabilities tend to refuse to request reasonable accommodation but choose to rely more than necessary on their own strategies and resources. The study also found that managers and co-workers prefer employees with disabilities to fully disclose their disability status during the hiring process or after entering the workplace. However, in contrast, employees with disabilities generally prefer to conceal their disability. This is arguably based on many factors such as protecting themselves from being treated differently and being stared at. Managers and co-workers were worried that employees with disabilities might function slower and be less productive than other people in the workplace. However, it was found that employees with disabilities can manage their workload and indicated high levels of quality performance. The study also found that when employees with disabilities want to exit the workplace due to different reasons, some of which concern their quality of life, they tend to hide this from their employers. It was also found that on-the-job-success of employees with disabilities tends to rise for those with good managers. Employees with disabilities also indicated that they create support structures in the workplace through identifying co-workers that are willing to help them and always let them know that the fact that they may require help does not mean that they lack initiative or independence.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

Disability can be understood through the *Social Model of Disability*. Academics working in the field of disability studies, as well as practitioners providing disability services, have been increasingly influenced by its underpinning philosophy. The *Social Model of Disability* is rooted in the struggle of individuals with disabilities for the realisation of their civil rights (Burchardt, 2004). According to Du Plessis (2013), the *Social Model* has its roots in the work of British activists who, in 1976 wrote:

> In our view, it is society which disables...Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily excluded and isolated from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed society (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976, p. 14).

In essence, the *Social Model of Disability* arises from the social, economic and physical environment in which disabled people find themselves (Burchardt, 2004). The model provides a way of conceptualising the disadvantage experienced by individuals with disabilities which emphasises the social, environmental and economic barriers to participation in society (Crow, 1996). The *Social Model of Disability* describes disability as; the limitation or loss of opportunities to participate in the life of the community on an equal level as others (Burchardt, 2004). The *Social Model* leads to demands for better accessibility of buildings, information, and transport as well as for measures to oppose discrimination in employment and other spheres of activity. This model focuses on the disabling environment (Maart, Eide, Loeb & Ka Toni, 2007). Du Plessis (2013) also concurs that the model's main focus is on the ways in which society puts barriers to the advancement and full participation of people who are unable to perform 'general' social roles. The *Social Model of Disability* was theorised principally by a disabled scholar Michael Oliver (Terzi, 2004).

Mont (2007) argues that the *Social Model of Disability* conceptualises disability as arising from the interaction of an individual's functional status with the cultural, physical and policy environments. If the environment is designed for the full range of human functioning and integrates appropriate accommodations and supports them, individuals with functional limitations would not

be "disabled" in that they would be able to fully participate in society. According to the *Social Model*, disability is the outcome of the interaction of an individual and their environment and thus is neither individual nor environment specific (Mont, 2007). Oliver (2004), in his valuable contribution in the development of the *Social Model of Disability*, succinctly asserts that impairment is not the main cause of social exclusion of people with disabilities, but that what causes the exclusion is the way society, including employers and co-workers, respond to individuals with impairments.

The *Social Model* theorists put an emphasis on the need for disabled people's organisations such as democratic organisations of disabled people. According to Albrecht (1992), this notion is supported by the fact that people living with disabilities are the experts on the impact of disability, not doctors, therapist, care assistants, social workers or researchers. The social disability model advocates for social change which is the removal of disabling barriers as the solution to the disadvantages experienced by disabled individuals (Crow, 1996). The *Social Model of Disability* rejects the view of disability as being problematic. On the contrary, it focuses on discrimination as the major obstacle to a disabled person's quality of life (Crow, 1996). This model has also made a significant influence in the field of Disability Studies, and also on the educational perspectives on inclusion (Terzi, 2004).

The *Social Model of Disability* should not be considered as a rigid entity, but rather, as a cluster of approaches to the understanding of the notion of disablement. Different variants of the model attribute differing and relative importance to a multiplicity of factors that result in the oppression and discrimination that disabled people experience. However, common to all variants of the *Social Model* is the belief that, at root, "disability" and "disablement" are socio-political constructions (Lang, 2001).

The *Social Model* arose in response to the critique of the *Medical Model of Disability*. The primary focus of analysis is the manner in which the *Social Model* shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual to the ability of society to systematically oppress and discriminate against disabled people and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their everyday lives (Lang, 2007). Disability is, therefore, situated in the wider, external environment and is not explicable as a consequence of an individual's physical and/or cognitive deficiencies (Lang, 2007). Thus, in

focusing upon the manner in which disability is socially produced, the *Social Model* gives precedence to the importance of politics, empowerment, citizenship and choice. Furthermore, disability is the result of society's failure to provide adequate and appropriate services. Consequently, the needs of disabled people are not adequately accounted for within the contemporary social organisation of society (Lang, 2001). Thus, the socio-political construction of disability is aptly articulated in the following pronouncement to the effect that:

> Having an impairment was seen as a 'personal tragedy'- a conclusion which united policy makers, service providers and the wider public. It seemed to dictate a life of 'passive victim' characterised by disadvantage, exclusion, and by dependency on assistance from friends and family and a 'safety net' of state welfare services and benefits (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999, p. 11).

Simply put, the social environment is a major contributory factor to the unfair discrimination that people with disabilities are subjected to as well as the unfavourable circumstances that they endure. In their study, DePoy and Gilson (2010) also support the *Social Model* by asserting that disability is regarded as a 'social condition' in which bodies with impairments are met with exclusion and discrimination. The *Social Model of Disability* takes into account the disabling environments and the disabling society as well as the impact they have on disability and the experiences of people with disabilities.

This model positions disability as a social phenomenon in society. It simply implies that disability is entirely caused by social and environmental factors (Du Plessis, 2013). According to the *Social Model of Disability*, one's disability becomes a society's concern and, therefore, the social environment must change to fit the person. The *Social Model of Disability*, as a school of thought, emphasises that an individual's disability does not mean an individual's inability (Hurling, 2008). The model also puts emphasis on society's failure to accommodate individuals with disabilities. DePoy and Gilson (2010) also argue that the model's focus is on the ways in which society puts barriers to the advancement and full participation of people who are unable to perform 'general' social roles. Hurling (2008) argues that the *Social Model of Disability* does not place major focus on the impairment of the individual, but it centralises an individual with the disability and their human dignity. Due to this, the *Social Model* is also described as the human rights model of disability (Hurling, 2008).

Scholars, such as Gallagher, Connor and Ferri (2014), also posit that the *Social Model of Disability* challenges the dominant model of disability which is the *Medical Model*. The *Medical Model*

views disability as something that needed to be cured or fixed. Tugli, Klu and Morwes (2014) also support this view by positing that the *Social Model of Disability* came about in opposition to the *Medical Model* which regarded disability as a medical problem that involves personal tragedy and requires treatment. In addition, the *Social Model of Disability* promoted the notion that persons with disabilities have an active involvement in research about themselves and also a major role to play in disability studies. Arguably, it is important to realise that the social approach to disability cannot be followed solely (Hurling, 2008). Thus, both the medical and social approaches are required in the interpretation of disability. Hurling (2008) argues that the South African definition of 'people with disabilities' is not solely embedded on the *Social Model.*, On the contrary, there is a connection of the two approaches in the definition. It links the *Social Model*'s sensitivity and awareness that external factors also contribute to the creation of disability with the certainty of the medical model (Hurling, 2008).

In their study, Gallagher et al. (2014) posit that the conceptual framework of 'social constructionism' is central to the *Social Model of Disability* which emphasises that everything human beings know about the world is inevitably instilled by their experiences, language, values and more. In essence, human knowledge is culturally constructed and not objectively discovered. Societal and cultural values and individual beliefs shape what we come to know about the world and not our direct observation of how things really are. Thus, our knowledge is not value-free.

However, the *Social Model of Disability* is not without critics. According to Mulvany (2000), the social approach to disability should be mainly concerned with critiquing medical intervention in only areas of an individual's life that are not related to illness or impairment. Du Plessis (2013) also argues that the *Social Model* has been criticised for not recognising the personal restrictions that result from impairments. In addition, Gallagher et al. (2014) argue that the *Social Model of Disability* has received criticism for ignoring the role of biology in the issue of disability and that it fails to acknowledge that disabilities are mainly intrinsic and thus raises a simplistic cultural determinism. Moreover, Anastasiou and Kauffan (2013) suggest that some scholars in the field of disability have raised concerns that the *Social Model*'s understanding of disability as socially constructed occasioned the denial of person's embodied experience, including that of illness, emotional distress and pain. Shakespeare (2006) also critiques the *Social Model of Disability* by arguing that it removes the focus from an individual and their mental and physical deficits to the

ways in which the wider society excludes or includes them albeit on the positive side it removes barriers that disabled people face.

It bears repeating at this stage of the discussion that the *Social Model of Disability* advocates the view that disability is socially constructed simply because a person's attributes cannot be separated from the physical, cultural, and social environment that makes those attributes meaningful (Gallagher, et al., 2014). When applying the *Social Model of Disability,* it is important to acknowledge that people differ from one another though the focus should be on what meaning is brought to those differences and how we interpret and respond to them. Du Plessis (2013) also argues that the *Social Model* should not be taken as a one-size-fits-all model because it does not apply to all cases of disability. The *Social Model of Disability*, at its core, questions the limitations of 'normalcy', as well as who defines and enforces those restrictions and most importantly the consequences for those both outside and inside of these culturally determined and fluctuating positions (Gallagher et al., 2014). In essence, therefore, the *Social Model* considers 'normalcy' as socially defined, specific to context and subject to change.

In summary, the *Social Model of Disability* considers individuals with disabilities as an important and integral part of society. An individual's environment has a large impact on the experience of disability. Therefore, inaccessible environments create barriers to the inclusion and the involvement of individuals with disabilities (World Health Organisation, 2011). The *Social Model of Disability* is rooted in the core principle of identifying barriers and developing solutions to them. Moreover, as stated by Rieser (2012), the *Social Model* values an individual's dignity regardless of their disability status. As stated by Tugli, Klu and Morwes (2014), it is clear that the *Social Model of Disability* is intended to be developmental and empowering.

<center>**Chapter Four**</center>
<center>**Research Methodology**</center>

4.1 Research design

This study is qualitative in nature and has opted for the use of interviews (in-depth interviews) for the collection of the data pertaining to the study. The choice of the qualitative method was informed by the fact that it had the potential of enabling me interact directly with employees with disabilities by means of interviews with the objective of getting an 'insider's perspective on the meaning and experiences of the respondents in the study. In qualitative research, data is collected not only using the spoken or written language but also language recorded observations, and the data is analysed through identifying and categorising themes (Druckman, 2005). Researchers conducting qualitative research collect data in the field which constitute the site where the research respondents experience the problem or issue being studied. Thus, qualitative researchers gather up-close information by talking directly to respondents and observe them act and behave within their particular context (Creswell, 2007).

When using qualitative research methods, the researcher gets to study selected issues in depth, detail and openness, through explicit identification and understanding of the categories of information that arise from the data (Druckman, 2005). According to Creswell (2007) qualitative research is conducted to develop a detailed understanding of the issue and also to empower people to tell their stories, hear their voice and to create rapport between the researcher and the respondents. Through qualitative research methods, respondents are offered a chance to describe particular phenomena in their own words and conditions thereby ensuring that the research findings reflect the respondent's perspective. In essence, qualitative research is a type of inquiry in which researchers create an interpretation of what they hear, see and understand.

4.2 Sample description

Sampling refers to the process of selecting research respondents from the whole population and it involves decisions about which events, people, behaviours, settings or social processes to observe

(Bryman, 2004). In sampling, therefore, representativeness is the main concern (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

This study was conducted amongst disabled employees from two different organisations, and from various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The sample size for this study was seven respondents. It used non probability sampling in the form of convenience sampling to access employees with disabilities working in two organisations in KwaZulu-Natal. The respondents were sampled on the basis of the respondents' availability as well as willingness to participate in the study (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In this process, the researcher's aim was to ensure that the sample selected would be representative of the population in which the research project was based and research conclusions drawn.

Table 1: Biographical data of the respondents

	Age	**Race**	**Gender**	**Marital Status**	**Length of Service**
Respondent 1	41-50 years	Indian	Male	Married	7 years
Respondent 2	31-40 years	Indian	Male	Married	18 years
Respondent 3	21-30 years	African	Male	Single	4 years
Respondent 4	31-40 years	African	Female	Single	1 year
Respondent 5	41-50 years	African	Male	Married	15 years
Respondent 6	31-40 years	African	Male	Single	9 years
Respondent 7	21-30 years	African	Male	Single	11 months

4.3 Instruments

The instruments used to collect data included a tape recorder, notebook, pen, a questionnaire consisting of a section on demographic information of the respondents such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, type of disability, occupation, number of years in the employment sector

and an interview schedule. The questionnaire and interview schedule were developed by the researcher.

4.4 Data collection and ethical procedures

Ethics refers to the manner in which all those participating in a specific research initiative are treated (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The ultimate purpose of ethical procedures in research is to protect the welfare of those taking part in the research. Furthermore, research ethics also includes many responsibilities which ensure that the research project is designed and conducted in a fair, safe and honest manner (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). According to Neuman (2011), qualitative interviews should be conducted with clear confidentiality agreements and most importantly informed consent. Similarly, (Terre Blanche et al., 2006) accentuate the fact that in order to ensure that supportable and valid conclusions are drawn, strictly appropriate processes of data analysis should be applied. The employees with disabilities were requested to participate prior to the data collection. The collection of the data was done at a time suitable for the respondents. For the sake of informativeness, and procedures of the study and the data collection process were clearly outlined to the respondents. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the respondents and note taking was also done during the interview to assist in the formulation of new questions or to go back to what was said earlier. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the verbal data for use during later analysis. As asserted by Bryman (2004), transcribing allows the researcher to have a thorough investigation of what people say and allows repeated analysis of the respondents' answers.

Transcripts were carefully compared with audio recordings to correct errors and omissions. The transcripts were then coded to highlight the main themes. To maintain confidentiality, the findings generated from this study will be stored in a secure environment. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee. All the ethical procedures and guidelines were strictly followed in conducting this study. Transparency, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained and the issue of voluntary participation in this study was highlighted to all the respondents.

4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis entails organising, integrating and examining of the data with the objective of searching for relationships and patterns among the specific details. To analyse, researchers collect particular data on concepts, advance generalisations and identify broad themes or trends (Neuman, 2011). Data analysis allows for the improvement of understanding, expansion of theory as well as the advancement of knowledge. This study used qualitative data analysis. Notably, different approaches are used in qualitative data analysis.

In this study, framework analysis was used to analyse the data. This approach involves a systematic process of sorting material according to key issues and themes (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The interpretative social science approach was used in this study, specifically the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The aim of IPA is to explore in detail how respondents are making sense of their personal and social world. In essence, IPA emphasises the meanings particular experiences and events hold for the respondents. In a similar vein, Creswell (2007) argues that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is mainly concerned with trying to understand the lived experiences of the respondents and the meaning they attach to them. IPA helps researchers to see through the eyes of the respondents. Another important factor of IPA is that it recognises that contextual factors do have an influence on how meaning is constructed by a person (Biggerstaff & Thomas, 2008). According to Bryman (2004) the interpretive perspective of qualitative research focuses on extending the power of expression and ordinary language to help us get an understanding of the social world in which we live.

Phenomenology is also referred to as an interpretive process in which a researcher interprets the meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). This approach is phenomenological because it involves not only the detailed examination of the respondents' world but also attempts to explore personal experience. As such, it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, instead of an attempt to produce an objective statement of the event or object itself (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The Interpretive paradigm entails taking the respondent's subjective experiences very seriously as the essence of their reality by listening carefully to what they say and making sense of their experiences through interacting with them and also applying appropriate techniques to collect and analyse data (Biggerstaff & Thomas, 2008). In this study, this approach was used to emphasise the respondents' perceptions, feelings

and experiences as the most important object of study. It is also notable that IPA is related to phenomenology in that it focuses on the subjective human experience subjectively (Guest, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews, as used in this study, are one of the most effective data collection methods in IPA because they are considered as characteristically flexible in data collection and allow researchers to gain an understanding of the respondents' experiences and the meaning attached to them whilst remaining aware of the contextual factors that surround the interview (Biggerstaff & Thomas, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to note that although in IPA the interviews are led by the respondent, the researcher guides the interview and has to be questioning and empathetic throughout the interview (Biggerstaff & Thomas, 2008). In IPA, the researcher has a central role to play in understanding the lived experiences of the respondents (Clarke, 2009). Thus, IPA emphasises the active role of the researcher in the research process gives its dynamic nature.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Notably, thematic analysis goes beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas representative of themes within the data, which is themes (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Specifically, inductive data analysis also known as the bottom-up approach was used in this study. To make good sense of the data, it was reviewed, organised into categories and a comprehensive set of themes was established. Characteristically, IPA is inductive in nature because it does not impose a pre-determined theory but allows themes and ideas to emerge from the personal accounts of the respondents and thus allows the researcher to consider more new relevant possibilities (Biggerstaff & Thomas, 2008).

Themes are patterns across data sets that are vital to the description of phenomenon and are linked to a specific research question. The themes become categories for analysis (Guest, 2012). As asserted by Braun (2006), thematic analysis is rooted in humanistic psychology and phenomenology notes giving voice to the other as a key component in qualitative research in general. In this study, thematic analysis was done en used is performed through the process of coding. According to Boeije (2009), coding in qualitative research entails organising the systematically classified data in themes and category types. Simply put, coding refers to an analysis technique in research in which significant parts of the data are indicated, labelled and categorised into themes (Boeije, 2009).

It is important to note that reflexivity is of crucial importance in IPA. According to Finlay (2008), reflexivity ensures that the researcher is aware of how his/her pre-understanding and personal experiences influence the analysis of the data. This view is corroborated by Pringle, McLafferty and Hendry's (2011) argument that reflexivity can help the researchers to avoid many preconceptions. Thus, it is important for researchers to be able to identify and reflect upon their own assumptions and personal experiences in order to engage with the experiences of other people (Larkin & Thompson, 2003). The researcher in this study, reflected on her own ideas, experiences and assumptions in order to be aware of how her understanding and experiences could influence the analysis of the data.

Notably, an inductive approach to IPA involves, among other things, bracketing which refers to setting aside the researcher's understandings, pre-conceived ideas or past knowledge and experiences if necessary (Pringle et al., 2011). Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) aver that bracketing helps demonstrate the validity of the process of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies. Thus, in this study, the researcher made efforts to put aside her experiences, existing knowledge, values and beliefs in order to accurately describe the experiences of the participants.

As a human being, the researcher acknowledged that she inevitably influences the research process and, therefore, in order to minimise her influence throughout the research process, she had to bracket her own experience and knowledge. During the research process, the researcher clearly understood and recognised the fact that the respondents were the only people that had the best knowledge regarding their lived experiences and therefore adopted measures such as bracketing to ensure that the findings of this study represented a close reflection of what the respondents meant in a more practical and realistic sense. It is for this reason, therefore, that an inductive data analysis approach was used in this study. In the entire data collection and analysis process, the focus was kept on learning the meaning that the respondents held on the issue as opposed to the meaning which the researcher might have brought to bear on the study's conclusions finally reached.

Chapter Five

Data Analysis and Presentation of the Results

The emergent themes on the experiences of employees with disability in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace are outlined below. Some of these themes have sub-themes which were used to achieve a more in-depth analysis of the data as indicated below:

(a) **Theme 1**: Factors relating to reasonable accommodation.

(b) **Theme 2**: Legislation.

(c) **Theme 3**: Adjustment and Adaptation.

(d) **Theme 4**: Financial constraints.

(e) **Theme 5:** Challenges.

(f) **Theme 6**: Job Performance.

(g) **Theme 7**: Inclusion.

(h) **Theme 8**: Opportunities.

Table 2: Major themes and sub-themes

Factors relating to reasonable accommodation	1. The process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation 2. Workplace design and environment 3. Equipment and Assistive devices
Legislation	1. Disability Policy 2. Rights
Adjustment and Adaptation	
Financial constraints	1. Budget 2. Salary
Challenges	1. Negative perceptions about people with disabilities 2. Disempowerment 3. Dependency and loss of hope 4. Job security
Job Performance	
Inclusion	1. Workplace relations, organisational support, understanding, and disability awareness 2. Involvement in decision-making
Opportunities	

5.1 Theme 1: Factors relating to reasonable accommodation

The respondents brought up different factors that relate to their experiences concerning reasonable accommodation in the workplace. These factors were grouped into sub-themes which are outlined below.

5.1.1 The process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation

Some of the respondents indicated that there are irregularities in the way the process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation is administered.

Respondent (1) indicated that his work requires him to produce reports and he needs to use a software known as 'Zoom Text', but he doesn't have this software. He also claimed that he has made follow ups and even escalated the issue to his line manager who also seems to be battling to get feedback. The respondent also claimed that ICS has not delivered to him and this is due to the bureaucracy that exists in the university. This respondent further remarked that the challenges of the university have impacted on him. Similarly, respondent (2) also indicated that reasonable accommodation was very hard to achieve in his workplace, and it took him almost ten years of his eighteen years of service to get across to his employer on how employees with disabilities should be reasonably accommodated. Respondent (5) also claimed that it takes a while for his reasonable accommodation issues to be resolved.

Respondent (2) remarked that the intervention of those who have authority also helps in the process of providing reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities. He claimed that they got a hold of the planning department of the university and were assisted by a very accommodating lady who sympathized a lot with staff with disabilities. Through her good motivations, they were able to get the university to install ramps for the people that use wheelchairs and railings in certain places around the university for people with visual impairments. This was also supported by other two respondents who remarked that if those in management lack knowledge and understanding of reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities, one might encounter challenges with attaining reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Respondent (1) stated that if the person to whom people with disabilities report lacks knowledge and understanding of their reasonable

accommodation needs, it causes major challenges for them as people with disabilities. However, respondent (3) indicated that he has come to realise that before pushing for his rights to be recognised or delivered on, he first needs to check and understand if the people in charge do understand the issue of reasonable accommodation and the needs of people with disabilities before providing them with reasonable accommodation.

Respondent (3) also indicated that his reluctance to request reasonable accommodation is what is preventing him from requesting reasonable accommodation from the employer. He claimed that he does not have all the equipment that he needs to assist him due to his reluctance to come forward and inform his employer about his needs for reasonable accommodation. He stated that he is coping without the equipment although he is aware that he needs it in order to be much more effective in his job.

Contrary to what was stated by most of the respondents, respondent (6) indicated that the process of providing reasonable accommodation for him is quite fast (or efficient). The respondent also remarked that he requested that his workplace be painted on bright colours in order to accommodate him as a visually impaired employee and the process of painting has already started in some sections of his workplace.

5.1.2 Workplace design and environment

The respondents also remarked on workplace design and work environment as some of the factors that impact on their experiences in the workplace as far as reasonable accommodation is concerned. The respondents had different experiences regarding workplace design and environment.

Respondent (1) indicated that he thinks many employers do not factor people with disabilities as part of their normal working arrangements. Respondent (6) indicated that his work environment is not fully suitable for people with disabilities because as a visually impaired person, he does not need to be in an environment where there is too much noise because it makes him lose concentration. Moreover, respondents (2), (3) and (4) all agree that their workplace design and environment is not accommodating to people with disabilities. Respondents (3) and (4) stated that

the workplace has been designed without the need of people with disabilities in mind. In addition, respondent (2) indicated that some of the university campuses are very inaccessible to people with disabilities because of their mountainous environment which has too many stair cases. Respondent (5) also related to this and stated that walking up and down the stairs is very challenging for him and it puts him at the a risk of falling and getting injured especially when he is rushing.

Respondent (4) also remarked that the workplace design prevents her from accessing some parts of the workplace and certain equipment she needs to perform her job. She claimed that there are some offices that she cannot access because of the minimal spacing of the doors thus forcing her to speak to people who are inside the offices from outside. Respondent (4) also added that people may think that because she works at the disability unit office, all the offices are accessible to her, which in actual fact is not the case. She also asserted that when she worked as a tutor, she had to rearrange everything inside the venue in order to fit in the wheelchair.

Some of the respondents also stated that the workplace environment is suitable for them as employees with disabilities. Respondent (3), in particular, indicated that he is satisfied with his workplace environment, and there is proper and additional lighting to cater for him as an employee with a visual impairment. While respondent (6) indicated that his office is easily accessible. Respondent (4) highlighted that there are plans that have been proposed to ensure that the workplace design and environment accommodate individuals with disabilities.

5.1.3 Equipment and Assistive devices

Issues pertaining to equipment and assistive devices for employees with disabilities came out as important indicators of their experiences in the workplace. Some of the respondents indicated that the provision of equipment and assistive devices led to positive workplace experiences in relation to reasonable accommodation, whereas other respondents indicated that the lack of equipment and devices to cater for their reasonable accommodation needs led to negative workplace experiences. Respondent (2) indicated that one of her positive experiences with reasonable accommodation in the workplace is that they installed his assistive device properly so that he can work efficiently. Similarly, respondent (3) expressed that he is satisfied with the equipment and assistive devices available to him as an employee with visual impairment. He indicated that he is able to get all his

work documents reformatted at the university's reformatting office where they adjust the font and make it suitable for him to read. Respondent (6) also expressed his satisfaction with the equipment and assistive devices in his workplace, claiming that he has an assistant who writes and reads for him. He also highlighted that he has a computer that is suitable for him as a partially sighted person and a calculator that he can use to count. The respondent indicated that he has all the necessary tools that assist him to easily perform his duties.

Respondents also remarked that they experience challenges regarding workplace equipment and facilities when these are dysfunctional and also when they are inaccessible or not user friendly to them as people with disabilities and when these are not provided. Respondent (4) remarked that in contemporary workplaces, technological equipment and devices are essential for successful job performance and she finds it difficult to access these technological equipment such as photocopying machines, monitors and projectors because they are often placed in high positions that are not reachable to people with disabilities, especially people in wheelchairs. Respondent (4) also indicated that the toilets in her workplace are not disabled-friendly and also remarked that the issue of dysfunctional equipment and facilities are a major challenge for employees with disabilities. Similarly, respondent (5) also remarked that he is concerned about the issue of the lifts that are often not working thus leaving him with no option but to use the stairs which is a challenge for him and puts him at the risk of being injured. Respondent (7) claimed that he is not provided with assistive equipment or devices and uses his own laptop at work.

Two of the respondents remarked that the lack of proper equipment, facilities and assistive devices poses health risks to them. Respondent (1) indicated that it has been very difficult for him to function without the 'Zoom Text' computer software for people with visual impairments and has been straining his eyes when performing his duties. Respondent (5) claimed that at some point he got his leg injured in a lift and remarked that lifts need to be serviced regularly.

Respondent (1) claimed that the lack of reasonable accommodation has a negative impact on his work performance, specifically on the quality of his output.

Respondent (1) indicated that at one point he was provided with the resources and equipment he needed to function effectively in the workplace and how the involvement of those who are in power contributed to this. The respondent also claimed that when he first came to the university in the

year 2009, meticulous time and effort were made to accommodate him and this resulted in him getting access to 'Zoom Text', a budget for transport, and access to transport when traveling across the university campuses, since he cannot drive because of his visual impairment. He asserted that his line manager ensured that his accommodation needs were catered for.

He also spoke about his experience with the lack of equipment and resources to cater for his needs. He claimed that when his line manager changed, everything changed and that he is now not reasonably accommodated and uses public transport when traveling to other campuses despite his co-function being to manage the disability support office.

In this theme of factors concerning reasonable accommodation, the respondents expressed the general view that employers need to really look further into the issue of reasonable accommodation and should do more to cater for the needs of employees with disabilities. Respondent (2) suggested that executive staff members should play their part and intervene in promoting reasonable accommodation in the workplace. He also claimed that the democratic government keeps telling people with disabilities about the new world accommodation and all the progress the country has made. Ironically, people with disabilities like himself are still not reasonably accommodated and still have to cope the primitive way which he feels is unacceptable. Similarly, respondent number (1) asserted that the provision of reasonable accommodation is a wonderful opportunity for people with disabilities. This fact notwithstanding, it is regrettable that it is not fully understood by many employers. He claimed that when a person with a disability applies for a job or enters the workplace, employers view the process of reasonably accommodating them as an undue hardship and they tend not to look at the business case for it. Respondent (4) also remarked that there is a great need for people with disabilities to be accommodated in the workplace.

5.2 Theme 2: Legislation

The respondents expressed their views on the legislation that relate to disability. The prominent issues that were raised by the employees are centered on their knowledge and experiences of exercising their rights in the workplace as well as the effectiveness of their workplace disability policy.

5.2.1 Disability Policy

Most of the respondents expressed that they are not satisfied with the effectiveness of the disability policy put in place in their workplace. The respondents claimed that the university's disability policy is ineffective and has not been reviewed in the past ten years. Therefore, this means that the issue of disability is not prioritised within the institution. He also claimed that embedded in the disability policy is a disability forum for staff in the university which has not operated for the past ten years thus preventing him from expressing himself on issues concerning disability. He indicated that the mechanism is within the policy but in terms of practice, it is not there. Respondent (2) remarked that he thinks the policy was copied from somewhere and did not work neither for the institution nor for the employee with disability. He further claimed that existing disability policies in the country were implemented in the past, thus making it difficult for them because the needs of people with disabilities in this modern day and age differ from the needs of people with disabilities in the past. Respondent (2) also claimed that employers tend to use the disability policy as an excuse and always refer to it when they are unable to cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

5.2.2 Rights

Some of the respondents claimed that their rights to reasonable accommodation in the workplace are neither prioritised nor respected and further expressed that their right to freedom of expression is infringed. Respondent (1) indicated that he tried on numerous occasions activities to exercise his rights by engaging people, but he realised that employers regard other demands as more important than meeting the accommodation demands of employees with disabilities. He also remarked that establishing a proper voice for people with disabilities is a challenge.

Other respondents indicated that they are aware of their rights as employees with disabilities and indicated that they have the experience of exercising their rights (and how it helped them to get reasonable accommodation). Respondent (6) indicated that he is aware of his rights and is able to exercise them in the workplace. He claimed that he is able to make requests for reasonable accommodation and that he should be treated equally as everyone else in the workplace. Similarly, respondent (4) also indicated that she is aware of her rights as an employee with a disability,

especially the right to employment. However, she added that she feels discriminated against when her rights are not prioritised and when there are buildings within the workplace that she cannot access and when there are things that she cannot do on her own. She indicated that there has been times where she has had to fight for her right to be reasonably accommodated in the workplace. She specifically remarked on her experience of having to fight for a ramp to be installed in one of the buildings that she could not access due to her disability condition. Respondent (7) indicated that he uses the communication line as much as possible to address all his concerns pertaining to his rights as an employee with a disability.

Respondent (5) indicated that he does not know of his rights as an employee with a disability. Respondent (7), however, claimed that his affiliation with a Trade Union as an executive member is one of the ways he used to exercise his right to be reasonably accommodated in the workplace. He claimed that his trade union and some staff members from the disability unit played a huge role in advocating the rights of employees with disabilities and convincing management to cater for their needs. He claimed that things have started to change albeit but at a slow pace. He indicated that his main reason for joining the Trade Union at an executive level was to represent support staff, especially those with disabilities and help them raise their concerns about reasonable accommodation to the management.

While some of the respondents indicated that they do get to exercise their rights in the workplace, the general view raised in this theme in light of the respondents' experiences, is that the effectiveness of the legislation needs to be enhanced in terms of workplace disability policies and the rights that employees with disabilities are entitled to. Respondent (2) suggested that special policies on disability should be put in place and existing policies should be reformulated to suit people with disabilities. He further claimed that the university's current disability policy needs to be reviewed because it is one-sided as it only accommodates the institution and not the individuals with disabilities. Respondent (2) also remarked that as employees with disabilities, they do not get notified about any news on disability legislation and they always have to find such information on their own. Respondents (1) and (4) claimed that the government's requirement for organisations to have two percent of people with disabilities as part of their workforce also contributes to the discrimination that people with disabilities continue to face in the workplace. They further claimed that organisations end up employing people with disabilities so that they can meet the government

requirements but are not willing to understand their needs to be reasonably accommodated within the workplace.

5.3 Theme 3: Adjustment and Adaptation

It is apparent that the respondents' experiences in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace are also shaped by their adaptation and adjustment strategies. Respondent (2) indicated that when he first entered his workplace, he did not have a special computer, but used a normal computer and went for basic computer training. As his way of adapting, he had to learn the keyboard by heart. He had to learn off by heart where the numbers, letters and symbols are. He indicated that this adaptation strategy was challenging and it took him some time, but he ended getting it right because he had no other option but needed to use the computer to work properly. Respondent (2) also remarked on his experience of having had to change his work environment, moving from one campus to another and relearning everything. He indicates that this was challenging but he adjusted to the situation by taking ownership of his problems and dealing with them step by step.

Respondent (3) indicated that when he first came to his workplace, the system of filing was not suitable for him as a person with visual impairment. The person that worked in his office before him did not have a disability and did all her work by handwriting. As an adjustment and adaptation strategy, he formed an electronic backup of all the documents in the office and also printed out hard copies in order to make sure that everything remains in order and continuity is maintained. Respondent (6), who also has a visual impairment, indicated that to avoid straining his eyes when performing his work duties, he uses his hands more and measuring equipment that is specially designed for people who cannot see. Whereas, respondent (3) indicated that he adjusts to his work environment by seeking assistance from his co-workers and thereafter learn to do things on his own to make them suitable for him as an employee with visual impairment.

 Respondents (6) and (4) also indicated that they adapt and adjust to the workplace environment by seeking assistance from co-workers. Respondent (6) indicated that he adjusted to the work environment by befriending other visually impaired co-workers who had been in the workplace for a longer period of time and have a good understanding of his situation and asked them to assist

him with directions around the building. Respondent (4) indicated that as much as she knows that she is capable of performing certain tasks, but because she is in a wheelchair, she has to adjust by accepting the fact that she has to seek assistance from other people.

Respondent (3) also indicated that he identifies facilities and resources that are available in his work environment and makes use of them as a way of adapting in the workplace. He claimed that he is able to spot support services and facilities that are available in his work environment that can assist him, even though they are not specifically put in place with the intention of accommodating him as an individual.

Respondents (3) and (7) indicated that the fact that they were familiar with the environment made it easier for them to adapt to the workplace. Respondent (3) claimed that he was aware of a lot of things in his work environment because he was a student there before becoming an employee. As a result of this, it was easy for him to adjust and adapt to it.

Respondents (4) and (7) indicated that when they got to the work environment they adapted by making themselves comfortable through letting the people around them know that they should not treat them differently because of their disability status. Respondent (7) claimed that he makes sure that the people he interacts with or works with know that his disability means nothing to him. Similarly, respondent (4) remarked that people tend to have misconceptions about people with disabilities when they are looking at them from a distance. Therefore, she makes sure that she lets the people around her see that she is a normal and open-minded person.

5.4 Theme 4: Financial constraints

It was also evident that financial constraints had a significant impact on the experiences of the respondents in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Most of the respondents admitted that lack of financial resources prevented them from acquiring reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

5.4.1 Budget

Some of the respondents stated that budget issues contributed to the lack of reasonable accommodation in their workplace. Respondent (2) indicated that assistive devices and computer software that is usually needed by people with disabilities is expensive and in most cases employers indicate that they do not have the budget for it and are often reluctant to provide it.

Two of the respondents stated that they have some reasonable accommodation needs which they do not raise to their employers because they are aware of the financial constraints that exist. Respondent (3) indicated that there are financial constraints and limited resources in his work environment and, therefore, he only makes reasonable accommodation requests when it is really a priority and not only because he knows he has a right to it. Similarly, respondent (6) claimed that when he is told that there is no money or budget to cater for his reasonable accommodation needs, he does not oppose this because he knows it will not help since he does not even know how much money his employer has. He further indicated that financial constraints have prevented him from being reasonably accommodated in the workplace.

5.4.2 Salary

The respondents also raised the issue of low salaries as a concern. Respondent (6) claimed that employees with disabilities earn a low salary when compared to other non-disabled employees, even if they are in the same position, have the same responsibilities and perform the same duties. He further claimed that even if employees with a disability have a larger workload than their non-disabled colleagues, they are paid less because of their disability status and this is a serious concern that needs to be addressed. The respondent also indicated that even though the salary might not satisfy him, he should be paid a reasonable salary. Respondent (2) also had similar concerns and claimed that people with disabilities are not getting paid what they deserve. He claimed that they are highly skilled people who learn new things every year and also share their knowledge, experiences and expertise with other people in the workplace, but they do not get recognition for all of that in terms of their salaries. He claimed that employees with disabilities do not have financial progress and they have to cope with their old salaries, year after year, yet they progress other people in the workplace through sharing their knowledge, experiences and skills with them.

Respondent (2) also indicated that the issue of his low salary unconsciously affects him and makes him wonder if he is not making any positive impact in the workplace and not assisting or progressing his colleagues. He also mentioned that in the past his department had ten employees and was suddenly downsized to two employees. As a result, his workload has increased, but his salary is still the same. He further indicated that he tried motivating for a salary increase because his work load had also increased but he was told that the amount of workload does not matter. He claims that this has a negative impact of him and he feels that it is taking him backwards in life and it can end up making him hide his talents because he is not getting paid the salary he deserves.

Respondent (7) reported administrative irregularities in the processing of payments. He claimed that he did not get paid for two months when he started work and when he was finally paid, it was not a market related salary for a professional like himself.

5.5 Theme 5: Challenges

The results also show that the respondents faced a number of challenges in the workplace which contribute in shaping their experiences as people with disabilities. To obviate difficulty in dealing with the corpus of data collected, the challenges identified in the data have been grouped into sub-themes in seeking to render a much more detailed analysis. It is important to know, however, that there is a connection between the different sub-themes and each one of them should thus be read and interpreted in relation to the others. .

5.5.1 Negative perceptions about people with disabilities

The data indicated that negative perceptions about disability and people with disabilities that exist in the workplace add to the challenges that the respondents experience in the workplace.

Reflecting on his encounters with different people, respondent (1) remarked that he is being related to as someone who is necessarily seen as an outcast because of the disability. From his account, it would seem that people in general have come to terms with the reality of disability. In his view, people seem to have gone past the stage of feeling sorry for people who were born with disabilities. The attitude adopted by respondent (1) is also shared by respondent (4) in her affirmative assertion that those who have disabilities should not expend their time and energy thinking about how the

so-called significant others relate to them as people with disabilities. Notably, respondent (4)'s argument is predicated on her understanding that despite one's physical condition, he or she is still a human being worthy of respect and recognition. Thus, people with disabilities should be afforded the same dignity which is accorded those who are deemed normal on the basis of them having been born with no disability. One' disability, therefore, should not give rise to him or her being relegated to the margins of society.

As argued by respondent (1), the effects of being negatively evaluated is made manifest even when the disabled person goes to work where there are people who are not suffering from any visible disability. Respondent (2) is also critical of those who expect persons with disabilities to present themselves as if they are without such disabilities. This respondent does acknowledge that the negativity they have to endure at times reach unbearable proportions as they are made to feel that their existence as disabled people is burdensome to those who are not disabled. Respondent number (4)'s view is that people with disability are regarded as nondescript entities to the point of being likened to zombies. For respondent number (2) the resolution to their predicament lies in them having to proactively do something about it as opposed to expecting other people to take responsibility for their situation. Thus, it can be surmised from the explication of these respondents above that they do not want to be pitied as though they cannot manage their situation of living with a disability.

Respondent (2) gave an account of how people in his work place do things that are aimed at testing his disability status. Since this respondent is visually impaired, normally he cannot be expected to make sense of his immediate surroundings in the same way as the other people without the disability make sense of the same surroundings. This respondent number (2) construes this kind of an expectation as being absurd and bewildering since visual impairment is not of the victim's making but is arguably a question of fate. The casting of doubt by the sceptics as regards the actuality of the visual impairment is indicative of society's inherent biases and prejudices against those who are deemed Other. This act of othering the disabled is attested to by respondent 4 in her assertion that in her workplace, people react in shock when they see her perform her duties as

though she has no disability. This predicament of being deemed Other and consequentially deemed to be marked by both lack and difference is also corroborated by respondents (2) and (7) in their assertion that the mere fact of having a disability leave people astounded as if what they behold is marked by alienness. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that respondent (2) remarks that at times in the workplace he becomes hypocritical about his physical condition by feigning normalcy as regards his condition of being disabled. What is befuddling, though, as averred by respondent (6), is that the disabled themselves also have the propensity of making other disabled individuals objects of ridicule.

5.5.2 Disempowerment

The data also indicates that some of the respondents, with specific reference to respondent (1) and (4) feel disempowered in the workplace and this is one of the challenges they go through, as it makes them feel 'disabled' and it reminds them that they are different from others in a sense that they have a disability. This feeling of disempowerment raises the question of belongingness which is understood as the human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group. In the context of this study, the respondents yearn to be accepted, despite their disability, as human subjects to whom society can ascribe the same normalcy as accorded to the rest of human subjects living without visible disabilities. Respondent (1) and (4) are of the view that there is need for the transformation of society's construal of disability as a physical condition which should not be used to exclude those who are disabled.

5.5.3 Dependency and loss of hope

Given their physical condition as disabled people, respondents (2), (4), (5) and (7) remarked that there are times when they are overwhelmed by the feeling of helplessness and isolation which then makes them regard themselves as nondescript entities in relation to the significant others. In simple terms, these respondents feel displaced and alienated from normal engagement with society at large.

5.5.4 Job Security

The following quotations indicate how the issue of job security is of a significant concern to the respondents.

Three of the respondents stated that their status of employment, which is a contract based employment, does impact on their experiences and reasonable accommodation matters. (3), (7)

Three of the respondents also mentioned that they fear losing their job often prevents them from voicing their concerns. (6), (5), (4), despite the infringement of their rights they opt not to challenge, mindful of the parental responsibilities necessitate that they sacrifice their right fair and impartial treatment.

5.6 Theme 6: Job performance

The respondents also stated that because they have a disability, they work extra hard to prove their capability, so that people can see that they can also be competent like other people. Respondents (4) and (5) indicated that with special treatment not desirable, their physical condition notwithstanding, they have to prevent being seen as different and marked by a lack which is made manifest by their failure to perform certain tasks performed by those who are deemed normal by virtue of not having visible disabilities, demonstrate resilience in striving to claim their rightful place in society. By so doing, they assert their right to equal treatment by being pragmatic in such trying circumstances. Society imposes a burden on them to prove that they are also made of the same stuff like everybody else and that their physical condition does not constitute the essence of their humanity. While the recognition of the rest of society's members derive from their being human beings, those with disabilities have to earn such recognition by having to work much harder in comparison to those born without any detectable disability. As asserted by respondent (2), employees with disabilities are not given performance appraisal and recognition. It is thus not only ironic but is also heartrending that this happens despite the fact that these disabled individuals have over the years become a fountain of knowledge.

5.7 Theme 7: Inclusion

5.7.1 Workplace relations, organisational support, understanding, and disability awareness

All the respondents (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (7) indicated that they have good working relationships with the people in their workplace. Among these are those who get support not only from management but also from co-workers. This is contrast with those respondents who only get

support from co-workers and not from management as well. Another respondent indicated that although his colleagues are supportive and understanding of his disability, there are also those that take advantage of him because of his disability status.

Respondent (4) indicated that she takes it as her duty to raise disability awareness in the workplace. Duty to educate, challenge stereotypes which are embedded in our social construction of reality, unlearn certain types of conduct which are informed by how we have been socialised. Some individuals are unmindful of the social construction of difference and normalcy which serve as the basis for discriminating against certain designated groups of individuals. Most of the respondents also intimated that there is lack of support and understanding that exists in their workplace. This fact notwithstanding, there were, however, dissenting voices represented by respondent (1), (2) and (3) who read and interpret the situation differently. Respondent 2 in particular is of the view that there is a lacuna regarding the bringing about of awareness of the reality of disability in the workplace and how responsible citizens should address the prejudicial treatment meted out to the disabled. In this regard respondent (2) averred that management should get more understanding about disability so that they can be reasonably responsive to the plight of employees with disabilities and thus afford them the most requisite assistance as dictated to by their circumstances. It is worth noting, though, that this will most likely materialise if there were to be an appreciation of the predicament of disabled people which they have to deal with on a daily basis.

5.7.2 Involvement in Decision-making

Respondents (3), (4,) and (5) asserted that they are involved in decision making processes in their workplace although the involvement of some them is very minimal. Such involvement, arguably, relates to the question of having a voice as a human subject which renders the human subject visible. Arguably, therefore, this involvement of the respondents in such processes in the workplace is an affirmation of their inherent human dignity which cannot be rendered invisible by the mere act of repudiation on the part of those who are prejudiced against people living with disability.

5.8 Theme 8: Opportunities

Some of the respondents indicated that they are reasonably accommodated in terms of workplace training, whereas other respondents indicated that they are not given opportunities for growth and development in the workplace. Respondents (1), (2) and (5) are representative of those that felt that they are not given opportunities for growth and development by their employers. This fact notwithstanding, some officers are reportedly favourably disposed towards the plight of the disabled and this places the aspirational respondents in good stead to embrace the opportunity this affords them towards the realisation of their aspirations. Thus, based on their experiences on the issue of growth and development, the respondents have different future plans and work goals that they want to achieve. It can thus be asserted emphatically that it is somewhat heartening to realise that despite the existence of constraints on a broad scale, there are glimpses of hope instilled by the affirming disposition displayed by some of the employers. Such favourable disposition has generated –the pursuit of business interest to some of the respondents with respondent (1), (5), (6) and (7) as cases in point. Notably, some of the aspirant respondents aspire to hold different managerial positions either in the public or in the private sector.

Chapter Six

Discussion

Factors Relating to Reasonable Accommodation

The respondents demonstrated a good understanding of reasonable accommodation. During the interviews, they spoke about different aspects of reasonable accommodation. From the results is it evident that most of them were not happy with the process of requesting and acquiring reasonable accommodation. Most of the respondents indicated that the waiting period in the process of acquiring reasonable accommodation is a cause for concern. This implies that employers take too long to respond to the reasonable accommodation needs of employees with disabilities. Simply put, according to the data collected in this study, there are irregularities in the administration of reasonable accommodation requests and it provisions in the respondents' workplace. This is in contrast to the findings of the study conducted by MacDonald et al. (2002) which found that in different organisations in America, the need for accommodations were identified and implemented during the process of hiring or once the person with a disability was on the job and that in such cases the accommodations were implemented within the first two months of employment. This, therefore, indicates that South African organisations still fall behind in addressing reasonable accommodation issues when compared to American organisations. On the basis of this comparison it can be surmised that there are underlying factors that need to be addressed in order to resolve this. According to the *Social Model of Disability*, it is these administrative irregularities or operational problems that disable the respondents and not their impairments. The work environment and external factors or systematic and operational factors such as administrative irregularities create barriers for employees with disabilities (Du Plessis, 2013). The provision of reasonable accommodation is in line with the main aim of the *Social Model of Disability* which is to remove barriers (physical, attitudinal, systematic, operational, cultural, economic etcetera) that prevent people with disabilities from inclusion and full participation in the workplace. The provision of reasonable accommodations as typified by the one requested by the respondents in this study fall under the *Social Model*'s solutions to workplace problems experienced by people with disabilities.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of disability by management is also a contributory factor to the issue of irregularities in the process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation. From the data presented in this study, it is evident that if those in authority are understanding and supportive of the needs of employees with disabilities, their intervention in the process of providing reasonable accommodation leads to positive outcomes. These findings are similar to those of MacDonald et al. (2002) which demonstrated that supervisors or managers were highly influential in attaining reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. Gold et al. (2012) also found that if the manager or supervisor is supportive and understanding of the reasonable accommodation needs of an employee with a disability, provision of the accommodation is likely to be made and its effectiveness is ensured. By supporting and providing reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities, employers remove barriers as highlighted in the *Social Model of Disability*.

Workplace design and environment is presented as one of the most important factors that impact on the experiences of the respondents in the workplace in relation to reasonable accommodation. Most of the respondents indicated that their work environment is not friendly to people with disabilities. This is reminiscent of Hurling's (2008) assertion that the design of workplaces mostly suits able-bodied individuals. Both the built environment and geographical factors were said to be unsuitable for people with disabilities. Evidently, when the workplace was designed, people with disabilities were not taken into consideration. As a result, some of the buildings are not accessible to people with disabilities. This is similar to the findings of Coleman et al. (2013) which shows that one of the main limitations that people with disabilities face in the workplace is accessing venues or buildings. Similarly, Snyder et al. (2011) found that buildings are not designed in a way that is friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. As indicated by the *Social Model of Disability*, barriers caused by the workplace environment and design account for the limitations which people with impairments in the workplace have to endure. In addressing the issue of disability, the *Social Model* takes into consideration the disabling environments, the disabling society and the impact they have on disability. In this study, the respondents' remark that workplaces were designed without the consideration of people with disabilities is another example of how society disables or creates barriers for people with disabilities.

Some of the respondents also remarked that the working conditions were not suitable for them as factors such as noise, lighting, minimal entrance spaces and mountainous landscape environment with too many staircases were said to have a negative impact on the employees within the workplace. A study conducted in 2005 by the *Department of Education and Training* in Australia also found that employees with disabilities had concerns about accommodation issues and required removal of environmental obstacles or barriers and also implemented measures to control noise levels and lighting. Van Staden (2011) also aver that some workplace buildings are not suitably designed for people with disabilities and this is a constraint that has a negative impact on the experiences of people with disabilities. This study, therefore, helps us understand that the disablement and limitation of people with disabilities in the workplace are not due to their impairment but that they are a result of environmental, attitudinal, societal and other external factors. The results also show that even some offices in the respondents' workplaces that are specifically put in place to deal with disability matters, are also not suitably designed for people with disabilities. This indicates that more still needs to be done in order to address the issue of disability by applying the *Social Model* in the workplace. Structures such as the *Disability Unit* are put in place to address disability issues in the workplace. From the literature, it is clear that their approach does not fully address the external factors that are the main cause of disability.

However, a small number of the respondents indicated that although they are concerned about other issues, they are satisfied with the workplace design and environment in particular. Thus, it is important to note that a smaller number of the respondents also indicated that there are plans in progress towards final implementation in their workplace to make it suitable for them as employees with disabilities. This somehow brings hope that the employers are doing something to remove the barriers that have a disabling effect to employees with impairments.

Issues pertaining to equipment and assistive devices for employees with disabilities came out as important indicators of their experiences in the workplace. Some of the respondents indicated that the provision of equipment and assistive devices led to positive workplace experiences in relation to reasonable accommodation, whereas other respondents indicated that the lack of equipment and devices to cater for their reasonable accommodation needs led to negative workplace experiences. Matt (2008) established similar findings which indicated that some employees were successfully reasonably accommodated, while others indicated that they were struggling with different kinds

of barriers. In this study, the respondents that have proper assistive devices or equipment especially put in place to cater for their needs indicated that they are satisfied with reasonable accommodation in their workplace. The provision of reasonable accommodation is one way of reducing barriers that are highlighted by the *Social Model of Disability* and this results into more positive workplace experiences for people with disabilities.

Some of the respondents indicated that the lack of assistive equipment to cater for their needs for reasonable accommodation often leads to health risks. This indicates a need for the most reasonable accommodation in the workplace and to create safer working environments. This, arguably, will not only benefit employees with disabilities, but will also benefit non-disabled employees as well. According to the *Social Model of Disability*, providing environments that are barrier-free does not only benefit people with disabilities but also other groups of people (Oliver, 2004). For example, an installation of a wheelchair ramp would not only benefit people with mobility impairments, but would also benefit elderly people in the workplace, potters with trolleys and mothers with prams. As a result, there would be efficient use of such accommodations in the workplace. The *Social Model* also explains that the provision of reasonable accommodation is a social process that affects and is affected by all the stakeholders in the workplace involved in the process of providing reasonable accommodation.

The respondents in this study also indicated that they have problems with accessing certain equipment that they need to perform their duties. This is due to the fact that equipment is often placed in positions that are not accessible to people in wheelchairs. As a result, they have to always ask others to assist them. Even though they know how to do their job, such barriers force them to get assistance from other people. The *Social Model* identifies such external factors or barriers as the cause of the problems faced by people with disabilities or as a cause of disability to people with impairments. Coleman et al. (2013) also found similar results attesting to the fact that difficulty in accessing and using equipment and facilities were some of the main limitations experienced by employees with disabilities. The *Social Model of Disability* emphasises the need for change in work environments and the way reasonable accommodation is provided for people with disabilities (Crow, 1996). The data collected in this study shows that there is a need for respondent organisations to adopt the *Social Model* when addressing disability issues such as reasonable accommodation. The findings of this study also indicate that employers' thinking and

solutions pertaining to reasonable accommodation are limited to a few factors, and fail to address other external factors that cause barriers for people with disabilities.

Legislation

The respondents expressed their views on the legislation and how it influences their experiences in relation to reasonable accommodation. The most dominant issues that were cited in the data are that of the *Disability Policy* as well as the rights that employees with disabilities are entitled to in the workplace. Most of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the *Disability Policy* at their workplace and stated that it is not effective and it is not properly implemented. The respondents pointed out many irregularities with the *Disability Policy*, some respondents indicated that the policy does not benefit them in any way as it benefits only the employer. The *Social Model of Disability* could be used as a tool to address the existing dissatisfaction over the disability legislation in the workplace. Arguably, the *Social Model of Disability* is a practical tool and not just a concept (Oliver, 2004). As such, it can provide assistance in changing policy with the objective of creating freedom and justice for people with disabilities and eliminating the hardships and barriers they experience in the workplace.

The data also shows that employers do not put much effort in ensuring that the *Disability Policy* is not only reviewed timeously but is also effective and inclusive of all the important elements that form a policy. The respondents are concerned that the policies are not designed to fit contemporary work conditions. *Disability Policies* that were designed long time ago no longer serve their purpose within the workplace because the needs of employees with disabilities at this modern day and age differ from the needs of employees in the past. The *Social Model of Disability* emphasises that people with disabilities are experts on the issue of disability as they experience it and thus know it better (Albretcht, 1992). Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that state institutions, professionals and policy makers should collaborate with people with disabilities in addressing disability issues because, as asserted by Marsay (2014), people with disabilities are the ones that have the best understanding of disability. The *Social Model* also identifies legislative factors as creating barriers for people with disabilities. One of the respondents also stated that the employer often uses the *Disability Policy* as an excuse for not providing certain needs of the employee. The identified irregularities in the disability legislation covered in this study demonstrate how such barriers continue to prevent or limit employees with disabilities from exercising their rights.

Some of the respondents were aware of their rights to reasonable accommodation. As a result of this awareness they did exercise them effectively in the workplace despite taking a long time for them to be provided with what they need. Other respondents stated that they are not given the freedom to express these rights and that their needs were neither prioritised nor respected. This also links with the above mentioned issues of management's lack of understanding of disability and the needs of employees with disabilities in relation to reasonable accommodation and also the irregularities that exist in the process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation. These findings of the study indicate that there is a great need for various underlying issues to be addressed in the employment sector through the *Social Model of Disability*. Scholars such as Van Staden (2011) also argue that in South Africa, there is no acknowledgement of the rights of people with disabilities as well as their unique circumstances. This, arguably, results in the lack of provision of reasonable accommodation and unfair treatment of people with disabilities.

What also appeared in the data is that *Trade Union* affiliation can contribute towards speeding the process of reasonable accommodation. One of the respondents remarked that his affiliation with a *Trade Union* aided in getting the employer to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. As a result of being involved with the *Trade Union* at a high level and negotiating with the employer, reasonable accommodation was achieved in his workplace. This is a platform that was used by the employee to get across to the employer and to exercise his right to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. This shows that there are many ways of removing barriers, as highlighted by the *Social Model of Disability*. Barriers exist beyond the physical workplace environment, societal, attitudinal, legislative and operational barriers and all of these need to be taken into account when addressing the issue of accommodation in the workplace. By drawing insights from the *Social Model of Disability*, employers should recognise that the voice of the people with disabilities is important in both the development and implementation of legislation and provision of reasonable accommodation.

The data also indicated that the respondents feel that the current legislation to the extent that companies should have at least two percent of the people with disabilities as part of their workforce also contributes to the problems that employees with disabilities continue to face in the workplace. Organisations tend to employ people with disabilities so that they can meet the government requirements but are not willing to actually understand the needs of people with disabilities.

Therefore, they end up viewing reasonable accommodation as undue hardship and thus create more barriers and limitations for them in the workplace.

Adjustment and Adaptation

There are different strategies used by employees with disabilities to adjust to the workplace. The adaptation and adjustment strategies of people with disabilities play a significant role in shaping their experiences in the workplace relating to reasonable accommodation. The respondents cited different adjustment and adaptation strategies that they use to cope with their work. These strategies include; seeking assistance from colleagues, finding ways of making the available equipment usable to them, discovering alternative ways of doing the job, identifying equipment that will be helpful and by raising disability awareness through educating their colleagues about their disability and inform them that their disability status does not define who they are as individuals. The findings demonstrated that employees with disabilities understand that there are different forms of barriers that contribute to their limitations in the workplace. Moreover, the findings indicate that employees with disabilities also adapt to the work environment by creating good relationships with their colleagues who become their support structures by assisting them with any difficulties or barriers they experience. Similarly, Church et al. (2007) also found that employees with disabilities seem to know how to create their support structures in the workplace through identifying and involving co-workers that are willing to assist them with different tasks for which they require assistance. Furthermore, Church et al. (2007) also argue that the fact that employees might require assistance from co-workers does not mean that they lack independence or initiative, this notion was also confirmed by the respondents in this study.

Financial constraints

It was also evident that financial constraints had a significant impact on the experiences of the respondents in relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. When requesting reasonable accommodation, the employers cited insufficient funds as a contributory factor preventing the organisation to take care of the needs of the employees with disabilities. Some assistive devices and other equipment needed by the employees are quiet expensive. Consequently, employers construe it as undue hardship and do not consider its positive side. In their study,

Crampton and Hodge (2003) suggest that thorough research must be done by employers on the effects of requested reasonable accommodation instead of only deciding to view it as undue hardship. Financial constraints that are reported by employers instil a sense of reluctance on the part of the employees to voice out their needs or to request reasonable accommodation because they would have been told that there are financial constraints and feel that they cannot change the situation. Lack of finances is said to be one of the reasons cited by employers and that it prevents them from implementing reasonable accommodation measures in the workplace. The *Social Model* relates to the lack of financial resources by proposing that individuals can be disabled by a lack of resources such as financial resources that are important in enabling them to meet their needs.

The study also shows that employees with disabilities are not satisfied with their salaries. They indicated that they are not getting paid what they deserve. Although they perform the same duties as their colleagues who are in the same level as them (and sometimes they deal with more workload compared to their colleagues) they earn a lower salary. Some of the respondents are qualified professionals, but still do not earn a market related salary. According to the respondents, this means that employers are not paying them according to their credentials, but pay them less because they have a disability. Performance appraisal in terms of remuneration does not take place and long-serving staff members with disabilities do not get any salary increase despite their length of service in the organisation having been reasonably long. Based on these findings, financial issues play a role in shaping the experiences of the employees in the workplace not only in terms of how they are provided with reasonable accommodation but also in terms of how they are paid. This indicates that employers lack understanding of reasonable accommodation and are not fully abiding by the law. As a result, they create financial barriers for employees with disability. The *Social Model of Disability* also identified financial barriers as one of the main causes of limitations for people with disabilities. In accordance with the *Social Model*, greater resources should be spent to remove all forms of barriers including the financial ones that are experienced by individuals who are viewed by other people as having some kind of impairment.

Challenges

The data indicates that employees with disabilities face many other challenges in the workplace. All the challenges indicated by the respondents are interconnected and they all shape their experiences in the workplace. Negative perceptions about disability appeared to be one of the main challenges that people with disabilities face. According to the data collected in this study, people in the workplace have negative perceptions about people with disabilities and often judge them based in relation to their disability status. Coleman et al. (2013) also found that negative perceptions and attitudes of employers or colleagues lead to the limitations that are experienced by people with disabilities in the workplace. As asserted in the *Social Model of Disability*, impairment is not the main cause of the social exclusion of individuals with disabilities but this derives from the way society (including colleagues) responds to individuals with impairments (Oliver, 2004).

One of the respondents indicated that other people in the workplace see them as incapable and doubt their abilities due to the fact that they have a disability. Another respondent stated that as soon as a person with a disability enters the workplace, they are perceived in a negative way and the fact that they might require reasonable accommodation is seen as a cost to the organisation. Coleman et al. (2013) also found that the main reason for the unfair treatment of employees with disabilities at work were the personalities or attitudes of co-workers and employers and not their disability status. The data collected for this study also suggest that disability stereotypes exist in the workplace. Due to these stereotypes, one of the respondents stated that he hides the fact that he has a disability to avoid any negative comments and reactions from people in the workplace because from his experience he has noticed that people treat him differently the moment they find out about his disability status. Similarly, Church et al. (2007) found that employees with disabilities prefer to hide their disability to prevent themselves from negative reactions, unwelcome curiosity, to maintain privacy and to facilitate their integration into the workplace.

Another respondent also highlighted that people with disabilities also have negative perceptions about other people with disabilities. This, therefore, means that negative perceptions about people with disabilities are held by both disabled and non-disabled co-workers. As stated by Snyder et al. (2010), negative stereotypes towards people with disabilities that exist in the workplace lead to a

range of harmful experiences. The *Social Model of Disability* identifies discrimination and other negative stereotypes as the main obstacle to disabled individuals' quality of life (Crow, 1996).

The data also indicates that some of the respondents feel disempowered in the workplace, especially if reasonable accommodation is not understood and properly implemented. This is one of the challenges that they often face which makes them feel 'disabled' and as such it is a reminder that they are different from others because of their disability. This also suggests that it is not impairment that disables an individual but commonly held societal beliefs, norms and perceptions as indicated by the *Social Model of Disability*. The *Social Model* is liberating in the sense that it makes the person who is viewing the person with a disability in a negative way realise that they are the ones that actually have a problem rather than the person with a disability.

Dependency and loss of hope also appeared as one of the consequences of the lack of reasonable accommodation. Due to lack of reasonable accommodation, the respondents indicated that they depend on their colleagues to assist them with certain tasks. Even though they know how to get the job done, they find themselves having to solicit assistance from colleagues because there are areas in the workplace that they cannot access, for example, a wheelchair cannot fit into some office doors. Accessing equipment is also a problem to some of the employees with disabilities. So, they end up having to ask their colleagues for assistance when they need to use certain equipment or perform certain duties. The data also shows that employees with disabilities end up losing hope in acquiring reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Financial constraints, administrative irregularities, lack of understanding of disability and reasonable accommodation by employers and other related factors all lead to this loss of hope. According to the *Social Model of Disability*, all these barriers contribute to the negative experiences and limitations that people with disabilities continue to face.

Job performance

The issue of job insecurity also contributes to the challenges that employees with disabilities face in the workplace. Most of the respondents indicated that they are employed on a contract basis and that their status of employment has an impact on their experiences relating to reasonable accommodation in the workplace. The respondents indicated that not being employed as a permanent member of staff might hinder the provision of reasonable accommodation. Coleman et

al. (2013) also found that people with disabilities are more likely to be employed on a contract basis. Another issue of concern that was noted in the data is that some of the respondents feared losing their job. As a result, they do not voice out their concerns to the employer even if they are not reasonably accommodated and face many challenges in the workplace. The fear of losing their job also influences their job performance. Leão and Silva (2012) found that being employed helped workers with disability to develop a sense of competence and autonomy.

Most of the respondents indicated that they have to work harder and achieve more to prove themselves in the workplace. They end up going the extra mile just to prove their abilities and to show the employer that they are competent like other people.

Inclusion

Most of the respondents reported high levels of inclusion in the workplace. They indicated that their co-workers and managers make them feel accepted and as part of the team. Their interaction with co-workers and the positive treatment and understanding that they receive is what promotes their inclusion in the workplace. Similarly, Arksey (2003) found that emotional and practical support for people with disabilities leads to positive work experiences and promotes their inclusion, not only in the workplace, but also in other social contexts.

The study also indicated that workplace relations play a vital role in the experiences of employees with disabilities in the workplace, not only in terms of how they are reasonably accommodated but also on how they adjust to the work environment. As stated by Butterworth et al. (2000), co-worker support and acceptance is of great benefit to employees with disabilities. All the respondents indicated that they have good working relationships with their colleagues. In contrast, Coleman et al. (2013) found that employees with disabilities were treated in a rude and disrespectful manner in the workplace and offensive remarks were made about them. Some of the respondents stated that they are supported and understood by both management and co-workers whereas others stated that they only get support from co-workers and not management. Similarly, in the case studies conducted by the Australian *Department of Education and Training*, the respondents indicated high levels of support from managers and co-workers. Matt (2008) also found that nurse managers played a vital role in integrating nurses with disabilities into the workplace. In addition, organisational culture was also identified as one of the main factors that influence the experiences

of employees with disabilities. Some of the respondents indicated that their workplace culture embraces diversity, promotes support, respect and understanding of people with disabilities and encourages inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities. However, others indicated that their workplace culture neither embraces diversity nor promotes disability awareness. As a result, some of the respondents are not getting the support and understanding they need from their employers and do not have proper measures or platforms that they can use to raise their concerns regarding all the different issues that they face in the workplace due to their disabilities. The *Social Model of Disability* recognises such operational problems as one of the barriers that exist in the workplace for people with impairments.

Based on the findings of this study, support and understanding from co-workers and management goes a long way in influencing the wellbeing of employees with disabilities. This relates to the findings of Schur et al. (2005) which show that in order to create better conditions and to promote the wellbeing of people with disabilities in the workplace, employers need to ensure that the corporate culture does not reinforce or create obstacles to people with disabilities. Butterworth et al. (2000) also found that support and organisational culture are important indicators of co-worker acceptance of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

It is important to note that the results indicate that management support and understanding have a positive impact on the provision of reasonable accommodation and its lack has a negative impact. As put forward by the *Social Model of Disability*, the way organisations respond to people with disabilities and their needs is very important. An organisation that embraces diversity reduces barriers that exist in the workplace for people with disabilities and thus promotes their wellbeing.

One of the respondents highlighted that although treated with respect, there are some colleagues that take advantage of them because of their disability. A blind respondent who is a supervisor at his work mentioned that some of his staff members dodge work and do not perform their duties because they know he will not see them. The findings also indicate that there is a gap in disability awareness and the respondents suggest that measures should be implemented to raise disability awareness in the workplace. This gap identified in this study links to the findings of Fillary and Pernice (2005) which showed that the inclusion of employees with disabilities into the work or organisational culture is lower than that of non-disabled people. This will also ensure that management get a proper understanding of disability so that they can be able to give employees

with disabilities the right form of assistance. The *Social Model of Disability* promotes the involvement of co-workers and managers in removing barriers that are experienced by employees with disabilities in the workplace. Raising disability awareness as highlighted by some of the respondents in this study is one way in which this could be achieved. The respondents also stated that their involvement in decision-making processes is limited. As a result, they rely on their superiors to raise their concerns and requests for reasonable accommodation to management.

Opportunities

On the issue of reasonable accommodation in terms of workplace training and development, the respondents have different experiences. Some of the respondents indicated that they are provided with opportunities for training and development and are well-equipped with knowledge and skills which lead to career growth. A lack of opportunities for growth and development was reported by some of the respondents. The respondents who are not exposed to any form of training and development indicated that they do not see any growth in the workplace and they have been occupying the same job positions for many years. This relates to the findings by Leão and Silva (2012) in which workers with disabilities indicated that the existing views of disability were an obstacle for their professional growth, recognition and inclusion in the workplace.

Based on their experiences, the respondents have different plans for the future. The *Social Model of Disability* makes it clear that different kinds of barriers prevent or limit people with disabilities from accessing certain things, such as opportunities, in this case opportunities for growth and development in the workplace. The progress of people with disabilities in the workplace is limited by underlying barriers that need to be explored and addressed through applying the *Social Model of Disability*. Kim (2007) also highlight that people with disabilities are not given adequate opportunities in both the public and private sector.

Most of the respondents have plans to look for better opportunities within the field of disability because they have a passion for disability management. They indicated that they have not discussed this with their employers. Church et al. (2007) also found that when employees are planning of moving to greener pastures, they do not discuss their plans and, therefore, employers remain unaware of their intention to leave. In conclusion, it is clear that all the themes identified in this study are interconnected and all contribute to the experiences of the employees with

disabilities in relation to reasonable accommodation and that the barriers identified by the *Social Model of Disability* are experienced by the respondents in this study and influence their experiences within the workplace.

Limitations of the study

This study was only conducted in two organisations and that limits the generalisation of the findings of this study. Due to time constraints and unavailability of employees with disabilities, only seven respondents from two organisations were interviewed for this study. Most of the respondents are from the Black and Indian race groups and this might influence their experiences and views on the topic. Lastly, six out seven of the respondents are male. Therefore, their views and experiences may differ to those of the female employees with disabilities.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a link between all the themes identified in this study. The findings indicate that one theme has an impact on the other. The respondents expressed a general view that employers need to really look further into the issue of reasonable accommodation and should do more to cater for the needs of employees with disabilities. There is need for management to cooperate with the employees to understand their needs for reasonable accommodation and how its provision will benefit both parties instead of viewing it as an undue hardship. While some of the respondents stated that they do get to exercise their rights in the workplace, the general view raised in light of the respondents' experiences, is that the effectiveness of the legislation needs to be enhanced in terms of workplace disability policies and the rights that employees with disabilities are entitled to. It is critical that policy makers and employers address the issue of reasonable accommodation within the workplace using an approach that will address the challenges faced by the employees with disabilities in South African workplaces which are different to those of other countries.

Organisations should put in place proper administration measures to regulate the process of requesting and providing reasonable accommodation. Management should also get training on disability and reasonable accommodation so that they can be able to handle reasonable accommodation requests effectively and also have a better understanding and knowledge of disability and the importance of providing reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. Adequate knowledge and understanding of reasonable accommodation and disability by management will also ensure that they are able to understand that provision of reasonable accommodation is not always an undue hardship. On the contrary, it can benefit both the organisation and the employees with disabilities. Arguably, this will also remove the perception that reasonable accommodation is a cost to organisations. It is thus contended that the acquisition of knowledge in this regard has the potential of helping management develop a positive attitude as regards the provision of reasonable accommodation to people with disability.

Using the *Social Model of Disability* was appropriate in this study because it helped link the different kinds of experiences of people with disabilities and the barriers they face. The model also

addressed the notion that disability is not a problem faced by people with impairments and that it is the lack of understanding and the barriers that are created because the rest of us do not relate to their experiences.

The study has also shown that a lot still needs to be done to ensure that workplace design is suitable for people with disabilities. Buildings should be made accessible to people with disabilities and things such as office entrances should be designed in a way that is disabled-friendly. The lack of equipment and assistive devices for employees with disabilities result into negative workplace experiences which entail health risks and difficulties relating to job performance. In light of this, organisations need to provide needed equipment and assistive devices to employees with disabilities. Existing equipment and facilities also need to be serviced timeously to ensure that they are well-functioning and are not causing any danger to the employees with disabilities. Lack of reasonable accommodation also causes employees to be highly dependent on co-workers while lack of knowledge on the importance of reasonable accommodation by management causes employees with disabilities to lose hope and become reluctant to request reasonable accommodation.

Existing disability policies need to be reviewed to ensure that they are applicable in contemporary work situations. Organisations also need to stop hiring people just to meet the government equity targets. Instead, they should hire people with disabilities having a proper understanding of their situation and be willing to provide reasonable accommodation for them, instead of seeing it as undue hardship. In the event of organisations failing to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities due to factors such as financial constraints, alternative measures should be implemented to cater for their needs. Organisations also need to pay employees with disabilities based on their credentials and not on the basis of their disability status. Salary increment and performance appraisal should also be granted to employees with disabilities.

The findings also indicate that there is need for disability awareness in the workplace. Both co-workers and management need to go for disability awareness sessions. This, arguably, will eliminate the existing stereotypes and negative perceptions about disability. Lack of knowledge of disability in the workplace causes employees with disabilities to feel disempowered, as co-workers tend to belittle them because of their disability. The study also shows that workplace relations have an impact on the experiences of employees with disabilities. Thus, it is important for employers to

promote a supportive organisational culture that acknowledges disability and understands the importance of including people with disabilities in the workforce. Giving employees with disabilities a chance to participate in decision making platforms is another way that organisations can use to understand their situation and needs for reasonable accommodation and as a consequence of this understanding provide them with appropriate reasonable accommodation.

Admittedly, more needs to be done to create opportunities for employees with disabilities in the workplace. According to the findings, progress is slow for employees with disabilities. Thus, training and development opportunities should be provided to employees with disabilities to enhance their skills and career growth. Training managers and co-workers on disability and teaching them about the fundamentals of the *Social Model of Disability* can also be an effective way of addressing the problems experienced by people with disabilities in the workplace.

Thus, it can be asserted emphatically that all the above mentioned factors need to be taken into account moving forward to ensure that people with disabilities are reasonably accommodated in the workplace.

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APPENDIX ONE: INSTRUMENTS

SECTION ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: (Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate boxes)

1. GENDER

Male ☐   Female ☐

2. AGE GROUP

21 – 30 ☐   31-40 ☐

41- 50 ☐   51 – 60 ☐

3. MARITAL STATUS

Single ☐   Married ☐

Divorced ☐   Widow ☐

Remarried ☐

4. TYPE OF DISABILITY: _____

5. YEARS IN THE PROFESSION: _____

6. HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OBTAINED: _____

7. PLEASE INDICATE YOUR POSITION IN THE ORGANIZATION

8. PLEASE INDICATE THE TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Government [   ]   Private [   ]   Other [   ]

How long have you worked for this company? _____

What previous positions have you held with the company? _____

_____

_____

What is your job title? _____

How long have you held your current position? _____

Briefly describe your work responsibilities (as you would on a resume):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX ONE: INSTRUMENTS

SECTION TWO: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview will start off with the researcher providing the participant with a brief introduction to the research topic, the history behind it and the reason for the study. The researcher will once again ensure the participant that the interview is confidential and anonymous. The participant will then be asked to fill in the biographical questionnaire and sign a consent form for the interview to be tape recorded.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Please explain to me your experience as a disabled employee

How would you describe your work environment in relation to workplace accommodation as well as the types of facilities that are put in place to carter for your needs as a disabled employee?

Would you tell me about your adjustment experiences in the workplace? I would like to know both your positive and negative adjustment experiences.

Describe to me your role in this organisation, and your involvement in decision making processes and other activities in the oganisation.

How would you describe the relationships you have developed with other people in the organisation, and the way that you are treated by different people in your work environment?

Have you had times where you felt like or noticed that you are receiving a different treatment from everyone else because of your disability, and how does this affect you as a disabled employee?

Please tell me about your rights as a disabled employee and if you do exercise these rights in the workplace

Please tell me about the challenges you encounter or have encountered since you joined this organisation

Would you tell me about the opportunities for growth and development that are available to you as a disabled employee, if there are any? As well as your plans for the future.

APPENDIX TWO: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sikhona Phakathi and I am currently studying towards my Masters Degree in Industrial Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College). The Masters Program I am currently registered for requires me to conduct a research study upon which I will write a thesis. My study is interested in investigating the experiences of disabled employees in South Africa with regards to accommodation in the workplace. My hope is that with this study, I can highlight some of the experiences that disabled employees may face which may impair their ability to function due to accommodation issues and how this may affect their overall experiences with their jobs as well as look at how organisations have made reasonable accommodation for disabled employees.

You are being invited to participate in this research because of your experience as a disabled employee. There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research, but your participation is likely to help generate knowledge and greater understanding on the experiences of disabled employees in South Africa with relation to reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

Your involvement in this study will entail participating in a one-on-one interview on the topic of interest. The duration of the interview will be between 40 to 60 minutes. Interviews will be tape recorded with your permission. Due to the nature of the study, sensitive issues may be discussed. Therefore, should you feel that you require psycho-social counselling after the interview or a debriefing session, a qualified psychologist from the UKZN Department of Psychology, Ms Shaida Bobat will be available to offer you some assistance in this regard.

Your participation will be voluntary and your identity will be protected throughout the research. Anonymity will be ensured by omitting any identifying any personal information. **Participation in this research will by no means put you at a risk of losing your job or any form of punishment or other institutional sanctions.**

Data collected will not be shared with anybody outside the research team and especially with no one from your department. All data will be securely stored at the Department of Psychology's archives, whereby it will be disposed of after 5 years. Ethical procedures will be strictly followed in relation to the storage and disposal of the tape recorded interviews. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me (Sikhona Phakathi, 209505257@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or my supervisor (Mr Dean Isaacs at isaacsd1@ukzn.ac.za / 031 260 1546). If you wish to obtain information on your rights as a participant, please contact Ms Phumelele Ximba, Research Office, UKZN, on 031 360 3587.
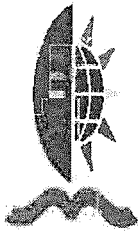
I.. ...hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

*additional consent

I hereby provide consent to audio-record my interview.   Yes ☐

No ☐

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT........................... DATE...........................

21 July 2015

Ms Sikhona Sicelokuhle Lungile Phakathi (209505257)
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Phakathi,

Protocol reference number : HSS/1610/014M
Project title: Experiences of disabled employees in terms of accommodation within the workplace a delineated in the Employment Equity Act, no. 55 of 1998: A qualitative study.

Full Approval – Committee Reviewed Protocol Application

With regards to your response received on 08 June 2015 to our letter of 17 March 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/ms

   cc Supervisor: Mr Dean Isaacs
   cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Jéan Steyn
   cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

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