

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF
MICRO-INEQUITIES WITHIN THE WORKPLACE**

By

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Commerce**

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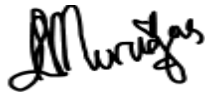
2019

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Employees are known to be assets within the workplace as they contribute to overall organisational effectiveness and productivity. When employees do not feel welcome or feel unhappy within their environment, it could lead to negative outcomes for the organisation in which they work. The main research problem is that this topic has not been widely researched and that there are no set ways to manage and counteract the issue of micro-inequities in the workplace, hence reducing productivity in the workplace and having a less conducive working environment. The objectives of this study are: to explore the nature of micro-inequities; determine the effects it brings on employees; and, ascertaining the support measures in managing micro-inequities in the organisation.

The negative behaviours and actions that employees elicit are considered as micro-inequities in this study. Micro-inequities are known to be small events which are regularly involuntary and hard-to-prove acts that are usually overlooked by the perpetrator but is usually felt by the receiver. There is currently a very limited evidence in South Africa regarding the prevalence of micro-inequities. Thus, this study explored the nature and effects of micro-inequities in the workplace from a South African perspective.

This study adopted a qualitative approach using an interpretivist paradigm. The study was conducted among thirteen participants in an organisation in the area of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and was audio recorded; furthermore, collected data was analysed using thematic-content analysis where codes, themes and sub-themes were generated and later discussed. The data provided a great insight on the experiences of participants with respect to micro-inequities.

Based on the analysis and findings of the study, it was evident that employees experience micro-inequities of all forms and classifications; and micro-inequities do in fact affect everyone with regard to changes in their emotional state, behaviour and work performance, despite race, gender and occupational levels. Although 54% of the participants gave a positive response with regard to existing support measures and interventions to address micro-inequities, it remains a concern that 46% of the participants were not aware of these support measures and interventions. Findings, however, could not be generalised to all organisations in South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Employees are known to be assets within the workplace as they contribute to overall organisational effectiveness and productivity. When employees do not feel welcome or feel unhappy within their environment, this could lead to negative outcomes for the organisation in which they work. The way employees conduct themselves and treat others in the workplace is also a contributing factor to organisational effectiveness.

Behaviours which are appropriate and positive can lead to a happy work environment; on the other hand, negative behaviours could lead to disharmony and an unhappy working environment. The concept of micro-inequities, which was introduced by Professor Mary Rowe in 1973 was used to categorise behaviours and actions which are displayed by employees. These behaviours and actions are classified as negative within the context of this study. Rowe (2008) conceptualised that when micro-inequities are present within the workplace, it creates huge implications for both the organisation and its employees. One of the major issues regarding micro-inequities is that this topic is not widely researched and that there are no set ways to manage and counteract the issue of micro-inequities in the workplace thus posing a problem to organisations and their employees

This study explored the nature and effects of micro-inequities within the workplace as well as found ways in which organisations could manage such negative behaviours which may have an impact on their organisational effectiveness

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The way employees are treated in the workplace plays a significant role in the culture that has been adopted by the organisation. Most South African organisations value respect as these organisations understand the effect it has on individuals. It is however, a sad reality that some people face the opposite of what they deem respect where they are subjected to negative behaviours that may make them feel worthless and devalued. The negative behaviours and actions can be classified as micro-inequities.

For example, if an individual had to think twice before attending work due to circumstances and issues of the previous day, the individual may be angry, emotionally hurt and confused which may cause him or her to second guess talking to another colleague about his or her experience. The sad

reality is that most individuals experience such imagined situations because of the behaviour and actions of their fellow colleagues. South African organisations adhere to the value of respect and adopt an organisational culture of respect in the best interest of their employees (Tshakhuma, 2014). However, many people feel the inverse of respect since they are subjected to adverse practices which debase their self-esteem (Tshakhuma, 2014). The behaviours which devalue and contribute to the feeling of disrespect can be classified as micro-inequities.

Mary Rowe conceptualised and coined the theory of micro-inequities within a period of 1973 to 1990 where she collected and organised materials to support diversity and inclusion. She started expounding on micro-inequities and characterised them as obviously little happenings which are regularly transient and troublesome to demonstrate, happenings which are concealed, as often as possible unintentional, routinely unrecognised by the guilty party, which happen wherever people are believed to 'appear as something else or different'. Rowe has since written many papers which emphasised the importance of micro-behaviour which could be unintentional or unconscious, and she continues in helping people in dealing with any form of unacceptable behaviour; furthermore, she assists organisations to support responsible behaviour in relation to positive and diversified behaviour (MIT-Sloan, 2019).

Her unique research within the period of 1973 to 1990 concentrated on the effect micro-inequities have on the academic community, and relationships within the American society and around the globe. The first broad introduction of micro-inequities in the corporate workplace started in 2002 by Insight Education Systems. It established the complex link between micro-messaging and corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Micro-inequities may be subconscious in nature, which means that employees could even hurt one another without even being aware of the outcome (Tshakhuma, 2014). This therefore creates a need for one to understand micro-inequities and to further educate and bring to employees' attention that this phenomenon exists.

Diversity expert and the president of the Insight Education Systems, Stephan Young (2006) stated that micro-inequities branch off from micro-messages (Gilmour, 2014). Micro-messaging, according to Jones (2014), are the signals that people send to one another through their behaviour. Micro messaging has two subdivisions, namely micro-inequities (which are the negative and subtle messages that cause people to feel devalued and demoralised) and micro-advantages or micro-affirmations (which are verbal or non-verbal messages which are of a positive nature). For the purpose of this study, the subdivision 'micro-inequities' will be examined.

Micro-messaging could be verbal or non-verbal and often unconscious messages which impact on the way people interact with one another (Jones, 2014). There are about 2000 to 4000 subtle signals

in any human interaction, and that it is automatic and often invisible (Young, 2014). Micro messaging could range from a subtle head nod that says 'yes' to a head turn that says 'I could not care less'. Regardless of the subtle and unintentional nature of the messages, Young (2014) emphasises that these messages do get sent, received and get acted upon. Since micro-inequities have a negative impact on an individual's feelings, such that he or she may feel excluded or have a low self-esteem, hence the impact of micro-inequities is so profound (Weiss, 2008).

A Korn/ Ferry international study, done by Hicks (2014) found that more than two million professionals and managers leave their jobs because of unfairness in the workplace. This creates immense costs for employers. This study also showed that women and people of colour cited 'unfairness' as the main reason why they would leave their jobs and further cited that their work environment was not conducive (Hicks, 2014).

Even though it was stated by Armstrong (2010) that everybody has encountered small scale disparities in the working environment, there is no overarching proof that micro-inequities do exist in South African organisations. There is limited research which focuses on micro-inequities within South African organisations; therefore, this study took place in order to explore micro-inequities further from a South African perspective.

1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM

There is a lack of understanding on the concept of micro-inequities as its nature and effects can be attributed to other well-known issues of diversity and organisational behaviour (other than micro-inequities itself) such as discrimination, stereotypes, sexism and racism. It is reasonable to assume that the nature and effects are attributed to these other issues as there is a fine-line between the concepts, hence most researchers have not explored it further to date, especially within a South African context. The unique nature of this study lies in the fact that micro-inequities are explored from a South African perspective rather than an international perspective. Countless studies on micro-inequities, as a theory, have been done internationally, thus this study aimed to close the gap in knowledge of micro-inequities from a South African perspective.

The main research problem exists in the fact that this topic is not widely researched and that there are no set ways to manage and counteract the issue of micro-inequities in the workplace resulting in reducing productivity in the workplace and having a less conducive working environment.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will include the following research questions:

- What is the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation?
- How do micro-inequities affect employees in the organisation?
- What support structure is in place in the organisation to manage micro-inequities?

1.5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The company in question wanted to maintain its anonymity at all costs, and only allowed the researcher to conduct the study based on this premise. Hence the researcher kept the objectives generic to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

The objectives of this study will be as follows:

- To explore the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation.
- To determine how micro-inequities affect employees in the organisation.
- To ascertain the organisation's support structures to manage micro-inequities.

1.6 EMERGING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework serves a blueprint of the study, it is taken into consideration after literature as been reviews and it reflects on the thinking process of the entire research process (Adom, et al., 2018). The concepts of this study are of an abstract nature and was developed by the researcher because there was a limited number of theories, justifications and studies based on micro-inequities especially from a national perspective. Furthermore, this conceptual framework was developed by engaging in literature about the different concepts that revolve around micro-inequities; its effects; and preceding strategies to mitigate the effects it brings to its victims.

Figure 1.1 shows the emerging conceptual framework for this study. This framework has formed the basis of this study. The framework consists of the nature and effects of micro-inequities, intervening and moderating concepts, and what this research could achieve.

This framework shows how each concept links to one another within this study. The main concept of this study was micro-inequities which can be summarised within the literature as negative, subtle and unconscious behaviour which affect employees in a negative manner. The nature of micro-inequities was responsible for the effects of micro-inequities on the participants of the study. The

different classifications of micro-inequities (Block A) brought about what type of effect (Block B) was being felt by an employee or manager within the workplace.

An intervening concept “surfaces between the time the independent variables start operating to influence the dependent variable” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 79). After a preliminary review of literature, the researcher identified concepts such as emotions, perceptions and attitudes to be the intervening concepts within this study as it surfaces between the time which the different classifications of micro-inequities start operating to influence and cause the effects micro-inequities placed on individuals (Block C). These in Block C were seen to be abstract concepts because it had an influence on the nature of micro-inequities which thus produced different negative effects on participants (Block B). These concepts surface internally and within employees hence it may have had an influence on organisational behaviour and diversity within the organisation; therefore, giving rise to the concept of micro-inequities. The researcher found that micro-inequities can be explored within the context of organisational behaviour and diversity issues as these negative behaviours may negatively affect employees which in turn causes harm to the organisation as a whole.

A moderating concept has a strong conditional effect on the relationship on the predictor and outcome categories (Namazi & Namazi, 2016). The moderating concepts, within this framework, were the interventions and strategies that could be used to reduce the effects of micro-inequities. Within the context of this study, the researcher specified that the interventions and strategies used to manage micro-inequities (Block D) in the workplace would have had a strong conditional effect on the relationship between the classifications of micro-inequities and its effects because without these interventions in place the relationship could not be modified and strengthened as well as being used to promote a conducive working environment.

Lastly, Block E was what the researcher was hoping to achieve at the end of the study, which was promoting a conducive working environment and possibly increasing productivity as well as reducing the effects of micro-inequities through interventions and strategies (Block D).

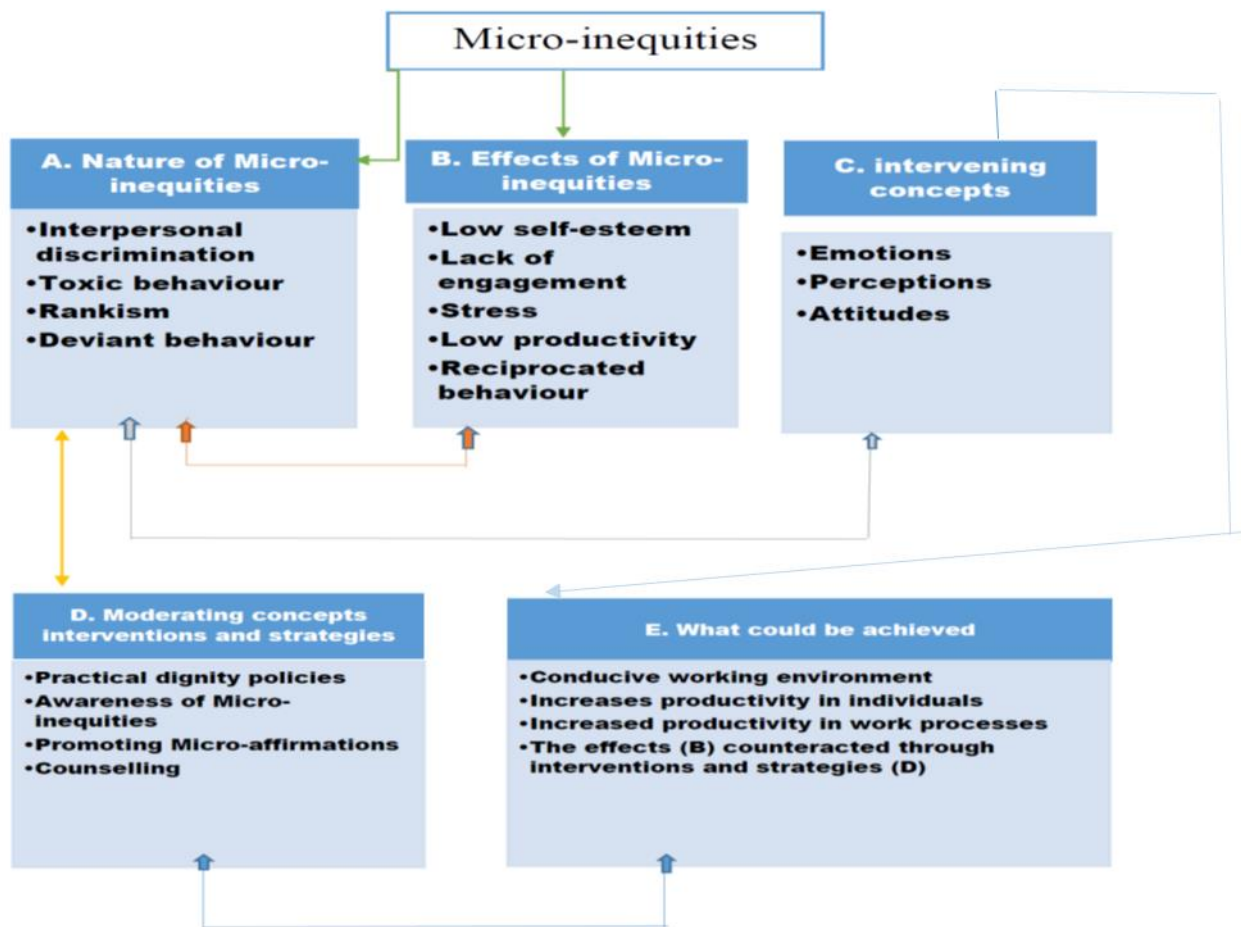


Figure 1.1: Developed Conceptual framework of the study

The main concept of this study, micro-inequities, and its classifications as well as its effects will be discussed in chapter two of this study where literature will be reviewed based on what constitutes micro-inequities and how does one define it (section 2.3); the different classifications of micro-inequities in relation to this study (section 2.4.1); and the effects employees go through because of micro-inequities (section 2.5). Furthermore, the intervening concepts shown in figure 1.1 will be expanded on in chapter two, section 2.5, to describe and explain how these abstract concepts namely, emotions, perceptions and attitudes, influence how one behaves especially in a negative manner as this study aims to bring about change. Lastly, the framework will be expanded in chapter two, section 2.6, with regards to the interventions and strategies that can be implemented to reduce or prevent subtle negative behaviours from occurring which can be depicted as moderating concepts in figure 1.1. The ultimate goal in this study is to evaluate all the concepts covered in figure 1.1 in order to bring about positive change in relation to increased productivity and promoting a more conducive

workplace, as shown in Block E, which takes diversity and organisational behaviour (section 2.2.) into consideration.

1.7. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The researcher focused on the negative side of micro-messaging (micro-inequities) rather than the positive side of micro-messaging (micro-affirmations) because of the need to help human resource practitioners and managers, within a given organisation, to promote a more conducive working environment as well as help increase productivity by eliminating the negative behaviours which cause adverse effects on employees and the organisation as a whole; in other words, the researcher aims to bring about change in an environment that is filled with negative behaviour. By so doing, a more positive work environment can be produced which entails increasing or building up employees' feelings of being valued, empowered and motivated in the workplace. Furthermore, the researcher wants to equip human resource practitioners with more knowledge about micro-inequities, since it is their responsibility to ensure a healthy organisational culture which supports and respects their employees (Tshakhuma, 2014).

1.8. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

General behaviour within any given organisation is an important component in achieving a culture that values and respects employees. When value and respect are present in the organisation's culture it increases employee engagement, motivation, retention and morale (Tshakhuma, 2014). Organisations need to be aware of prevailing negative behaviours such as micro-inequities as it could potentially destroy employees and organisational culture. Micro-inequities exist in every organisation; hence it is important to have an insight to the extent of their existence, the nature of micro-inequities and the implications it has on employees as employees are an asset to the overall success of organisational effectiveness.

This study therefore contributed to the body of knowledge regarding micro-inequities in South African organisations and to the literature on micro-inequities. The originality and abstract nature of the framework that was utilised and developed by the researcher shows that more research can be done and discovered in this area of study especially from a South African perspective. The amount of research on micro-inequities done internationally outweighs research from a South African perspective. Thus, it was important to not only add to the paucity of research about the phenomenon, but also to explore the nature and effects it has on employees of a South African organisation rather than an international one.

1.9. OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis was divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1: This chapter focuses on the introduction of this study that deals with micro-inequities in the workplace which includes aspects such as the background of micro-inequities, the problem statement, the research questions and objectives of this study; the conceptual framework used in the study; and lastly this chapter states the rationale and the significance of this study as well as the limitations encountered.

Chapter 2: Literature from secondary sources are reviewed in detail in relation to micro-inequities in the workplace. This chapter reviewed literature based on organisational behaviour in the field of Human Resource Management; how micro-inequities have been defined and described; the nature and classifications of micro-inequities; an explanation of the variables in respect of emotions, perceptions and attitudes; the effects of micro-inequities; and lastly, the interventions and recommendations to manage micro-inequities in the workplace.

Chapter 3: The research methodology adopted in this study was discussed and explained in this chapter. It covers aspects such as research approach and design. This chapter further discussed the target population, the sample size, and the convenience sampling technique used. The data collection methods and data analysis techniques used were further stated; and the chapter concluded by stating the ethical considerations, and the delimitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Research results have been presented, analysed accordingly and finally discussed by linking the literature review with the data that was collected. The researcher, in this chapter, tried making conclusions and drew upon the literature to make sense of the study and its results.

Chapter 5: The last chapter of this study concluded the entire thesis by summarising key findings. It provides recommendations for organisations and also for future researchers who want to do a study on micro-inequities, and finally included a concluding statement to sum up the study.

1.10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the value that the findings bring to the field of organisational behaviour, and micro-inequities, one cannot disregard the limitations that were encountered in the study.

- i. The findings of the study could not be generalised to all organisations in South Africa due to a case study approach and a small sample size;

- ii. This study was limited to four classifications of micro-inequities as it was of interest to the researcher;
- iii. Most participants did not know what micro-inequities are; hence the researcher had to explain the concept and give examples before interviews were conducted. This, however, would have possibly influenced their responses.
- iv. Most participants were not familiar with the concept of micro-inequities; therefore, the researcher had to brief participants. The briefing of participants could have affected their responses to the questions in the interview;
- v. The researcher had access to only one branch of the company in one geographical location, therefore results could not be generalised to all the branches around the country;
- vi. The use of convenience sampling did not allow the researcher to get more participants at lower levels such as the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled, this being due to the nature of their jobs which required them to be at their work stations thus decreasing their availability to the researcher.
- vii. Due to the utilisation of convenience sampling the researcher was unable to get equal proportions with regard to the equal representations of each racial group and gender in relation to occupational levels.

1.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter serves as an introduction of the study, which includes the background of micro-inequities, the research questions, what this study aims to achieve and the significance of this study. The conceptual framework was further discussed which highlighted the variables of the study and what the study aimed to achieve upon its completion. This chapter also highlighted the overview of the proceeding chapters and lastly evaluated the limitations that were encountered within the study.

The following chapters will bring to light more information on micro-inequities within the workplace from a South African organisational perspective.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter one introduced this study and brought into light the overall aspects of this study. Chapter two now focuses on the literature based on micro-inequities and expands on the conceptual; framework in chapter one figure 1.1

A literature review comprises research that has already been done on a specific topic. It adds value in terms of assisting one gain more understanding on the topic, to revise what has already been done by other researchers on the topic, creates a body of knowledge upon which the research is accomplished, studied, and analysed and ultimately allows for critical engagement of the topic in question (Galvan & Galvan, 2017).

This chapter addressed the concept of micro-inequities within the context of organisational behaviour within the workplace; however, most of the literature that had been reviewed was from an international perspective as this phenomenon has not been widely researched from a South African perspective.

This chapter further looked at the theoretical and conceptualised perspective of the phenomenon by reviewing literature that already exists in relation to how researchers define the concept of micro-inequities; the nature and classifications of the concept; the effects of micro-inequities on employees of all levels; and ultimately reviewed what other researchers have suggested as possible interventions and strategies that can be implemented to manage micro-inequities in the workplace. Organisational behaviour and other aspects on the concept of micro-inequities were further discussed and explored below. The literature review expands on the conceptual framework in figure 1.1 of chapter one.

The main concept, micro-inequities, was chosen which stems out of micro-messaging. The classifications of micro-inequities bring about different effects on employees; the intervening concepts namely, emotions, perceptions and attitudes influence how the nature and effects are brought about; and the moderating concepts, interventions and strategies, modify all relationships in the framework such that when it is put in place the effects can be reduced and the nature/classifications of micro-inequities can be prevented. The overarching goal is to bring a notion of change and to assist Human Resource Practitioners to be in better positions to produce a conducive work environment for its employees which could ultimately increase productivity of an organisation.

2.2. ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Organisational behaviour studies the behaviour, attitudes and performance of people within an organisation (Dailey, 2012). Organisational behaviour draws on aspects such as personality and cognition; the interaction of people within the workplace; cultural systems; power and influence; and, incentives and transactions among working relationships (Cross & Carbery, 2016). Cross and Carbery (2016) argue that this field is essentially about seeing how individuals think, act and respond in the work environment. Additionally, they state that organisational behaviour is concerned with advancing desirable workers' state of mind and practices, which enhances the general adequacy and effectiveness of an organisation.

Jha (2010) purports that it is important to study all aspects of organisational behaviour which have been mentioned in Cross and Carbery's (2016) definition, because it encourages the way toward clarifying, understanding, foreseeing, keeping up and changing worker conduct within the workplace (Jha, 2010).

It is essential to note that when employees' behaviours are of a positive and controlled nature, work processes are smoother and more productive. People form the biggest asset of any association, hence when their behaviours are of a negative and poor nature, it has a ripple effect throughout the organisation, people and the organisation's processes (Dailey, 2012).

Behaviour can be influenced by factors such as attitudes, perceptions, ethics, emotions, authority, culture, and values (Jha, 2010). This is evident when Rowe (1990) points out that when one perceives another person to be different or has a certain internal emotion towards someone else, a negative and subtle behaviour can be exerted towards the victim unknowingly which can be described as a micro-inequity. Organisations are made up of individuals from different backgrounds; belief systems; and who hold different perceptions and thoughts (Tshakhuma, 2014); therefore, it cultivates and contributes to how they portray and use certain behaviours in their day-to-day human interactions (whether it is displayed in the form of micro-inequities or micro-affirmations).

Even though changing individuals' behaviour is one of the main strategies to counteracting negative behaviour in the workplace, values are more internal and are expressed through behaviour (Smith, 2010). He further argues that it may be difficult to or attempt to change an individual's values, perceptions and belief system because these aspects are usually influenced by other people and/or are learned from childhood (Smith, 2010).

Organisational behaviour and the aspects related to it should be thus understood by human resource practitioners and managers because influencing change can be difficult (Tshakhuma, 2014); however, these behaviours need to be addressed with the aim of promoting a positive organisational culture and creating a conducive working environment.

2.2.1. MICRO-MESSAGING

Micro-messages are those inconspicuous messages that individuals send through non-verbal communication, manner of speaking and the manner in which they inflect words. Micro-messages motion at a prompt gut level how individuals feel about one another. One can utilize decent words when addressing other individuals, however in the event one incidentally conveys negative micro-messages, those nonverbal signs will have a greater effect than anything one may state (Tate, 2007; Weiss, 2008).

Managers, supervisors and other employees of the organisation ought to wind up devoted understudies of their own facial expressions, styles of individual commitment, non-verbal communication and other nonverbal informative traits. At that point they should endeavour to send positive micro-messages, not destructive ones that breed hatred and undermines performance.

Young (2014) suggests that when one comprehends the concept of micro-messages, one will have the capacity to improve one's leadership skills by incorporating one's organisational environment to bring about positive change. In other words, one has to diffuse negative micro-messages (micro-inequities) and utilise positive micro-messages (micro-advantages) to create a sense of creativity, improve work performance, and surpass objectives by infusing positive micro-messages at all levels of the organisation thus accomplishing a strong, inclusive, and high-performing workplace.

There are six elements that form a micro-message. Figure 2.1 shows these elements and examples.

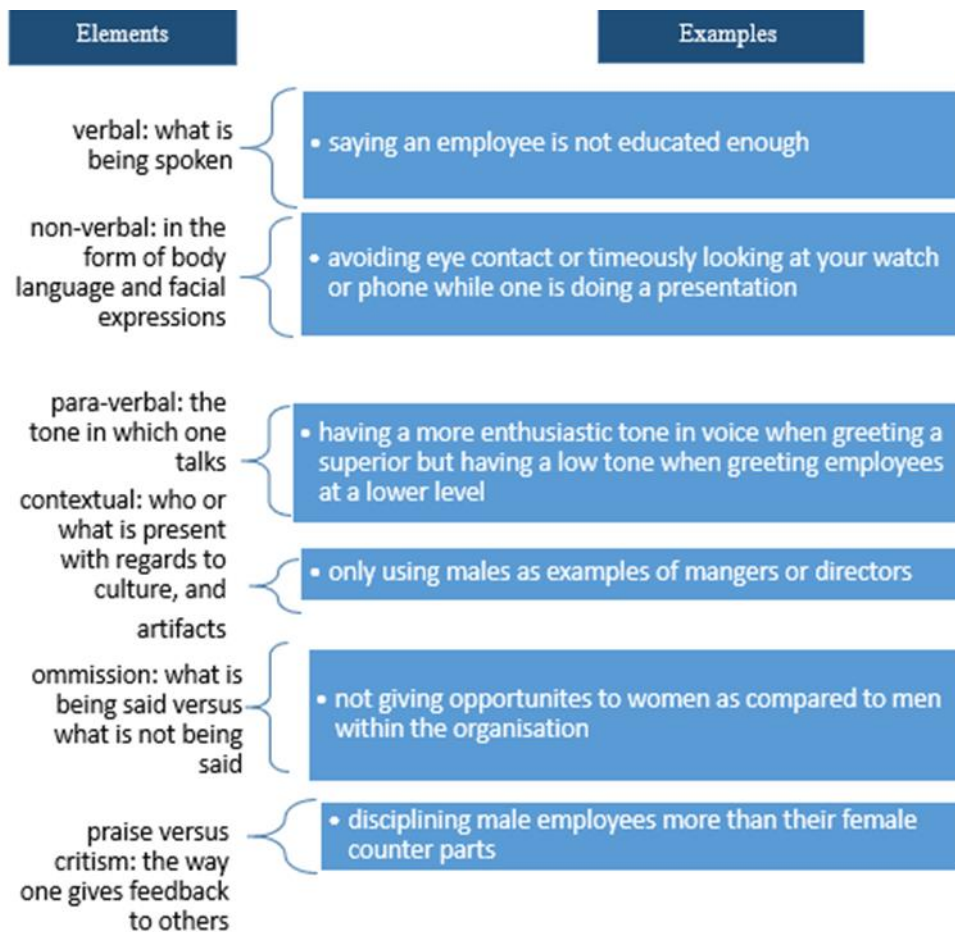


Figure 2.1: Diagram showing the 6 elements of micro-messaging adapted from (NAPE, 2017)

The negative side of micro-messaging is called micro-inequities, which is the focus of this study. Despite the elements shown in figure 2.1 as part of micro-messaging, they are also used to show the different forms of micro-inequities in the form of interpersonal discrimination. It can be shown that, micro-messages are conveyed in many ways.

2.3. DEFINITION OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

According to Brennan (2014, p. 2),” micro-inequities are small, unjust inequalities often pointed to as part of a larger story about larger scale inequalities”. She states that individuals often compare inequities with ordinary inequalities. An ‘inequality’ is a normatively neutral word while an ‘Inequity’ assumes that there has been an injustice that has taken place (Brennan, 2014; Rowe 2008). It is suggested that perceptions can be the reason why micro-inequities exist and it is deeply rooted in the unconscious mind (Brennan, 2014); thus perceptions are deemed to be an intervening concept within this study.

Micro-inequities can be defined as apparently small events which are regularly involuntary and hard-to-prove acts that are usually overlooked by the perpetrator but is usually felt by the receiver (Rowe,

1990). She states that micro-inequities occur whenever people are perceived to be 'different' and Young (2006) believes that micro-inequities do not belong to only a certain group, but occurs across all nations and cultures; hence, it may be easier to perceive others as being 'different'. According to Young (2006) the concept of micro-inequities emerges from micro-messaging; in other words, micro-messaging can be negative or positive where the former is referred to as a 'micro-inequity' and the latter is referred to as a 'micro-affirmation' or 'micro-advantage' (Young, 2006).

There is reasonable controversy with respect to micro-inequities and trying to understand the concept. People may question why they should "sweat the small stuff", in other words, why should one worry about the trivial issues. Despite this question, it is important to note that the small negative actions (intentional or unintentional) may have bigger consequences on victims in the long run as it affects victims psychologically and emotionally thus causing low productivity and lack of engagement within the workplace (Pollack, 2017). Micro-inequities are not seen as a cause for legal action because subtle and minor negative behaviours are not seen as unlawful (Tate, 2007); however, Tate (2007) states that one can increase the sensitivity of these small negative happenings in order to reduce the occurrence of it happening often; and, employers should cultivate a corporate culture where employees are conscious of the effects of micro-inequities despite the fact that micro-inequities are not seen as unlawful behaviour.

Micro-inequities can additionally be characterised by the manner in which people are singled out, disregarded, overlooked or marked down, in light of inherent qualities, for example, race, or sexual orientation (Wright, 2013). These behaviours are cumulative, and repetitive which create a sense of discouragement and devaluation that impairs workplace performance (Brennan, 2014).

Micro-inequities could be described as subtle or nonverbal occurrences that convey rudeness or insensitivity (Sue, 2010). In other words, micro-inequities may be what people say or do to others that show a sense of disrespect. Ferdinand, Lutz, and Tahir (2007) argue that these subtle and unconscious behaviours add up to a culture of exclusion to some individuals in the workplace. Sue (2010) concurs that the message sent is not of a positive nature and its intention is to insult the receiver through words or actions. However, according to Rowe (2008), these messages are often unintentional and unconscious in nature. Thus, the challenge lies whether the sender of the negative gesture or message was unaware or if it was unintentional, the impact is still not a pleasant one and may be felt like a deliberate action exerted by the sender from the receiver's point of view.

In contradiction to Sue (2010), Hicks (2014) argues that there is a difference between rudeness and micro-inequities. Rudeness happens occasionally, whilst micro-inequities happen constantly and is repetitive in nature thus creating a less positive organisational climate (Hicks, 2014).

It is also important to note that the way one may send a message extends beyond conventional discrimination; and, the gap between what is sent versus what is received determines fear, confidence, loyalty and even motivation to perform at high levels (Brownstein & Saul, 2016).

Furthermore, micro-inequities are not direct, and is when an individual has a feeling that something is not right about the way he or she is being treated (Hicks, 2014). This feeling of unfair treatment creates a significant impact on the receiver of the micro-inequity which is usually unrecognised by the person exhibiting the negative behaviour (Armstrong, 2010). Additionally, Hicks (2014) explains that the receiver usually interprets or translates the acts, tone of voice and gestures of the sender in a negative manner which makes the receiver feel as if he or she is being questioned about his or her abilities; thus, creating a sense of exclusion and in turn limits creativity and effectiveness. Rowe (2008), Armstrong (2010) and Hicks (2014) emphasise that the challenge with micro-inequities lies in the fact that one cannot foresee the behaviour happening; not preventing it; or stopping it from occurring because it is learned or influenced by the sender's environment or background.

Brennan (2014, p. 3) cites Brogaard's (2013) examples of micro-inequities and these examples include: communicating with only males in a room full of both males and females; rolling one's eyes when conversing; sighing loudly; consistently ignoring a person's emails without a valid reason; raising one's voice even though the other person has no difficulty with hearing; selective recognition of achievements; repetitively mispronouncing a person's name; checking one's phone or watch consistently while a conversation is taking place; and possibly confusing a person of a certain ethnicity or race with another person of the same ethnicity or race (Brogaard, 2013).

Each expert or individual may have his or her own definition of what a micro-inequity is as well as different ways in explaining what constitutes an act of micro-inequity (Ferdinand, et al., 2007). Rowe (2008) acknowledged that micro-inequities are a serious problem in the workplace; but, since it is mainly an unconscious act and often not recognised as an act that one can lodge grievance for, it is often hard to believe that micro-inequities do in fact exist and it is very difficult to describe them when it does take place (Rowe, 2008). Thus Brennan (2014, p. 3) suggests that a micro-inequality can be thought of as an inequality that "falls beneath the threshold of legislation or taking action".

2.3.1. METAPHORS OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

While it may be difficult to come up with a single definition of micro-inequities, there are many metaphors that encapsulate what is philosophically interesting about them (Brownstein & Saul, 2016).

Brennan (2014) cites Marilyn Frye's quote in 1983 which describes the birdcage metaphor. The birdcage metaphor helps one understand that focusing on every single micro-inequity is a mistake that most people often do. This metaphor helps one further understand how oppressed groups are treated in the workplace which is formed by micro-inequities. Frye (1983) describes that when asked to look at one wire of the birdcage, one will not be able to see the other wires of the cage; regardless of looking at one wire at a time, one will still not have the ability to know or understand why a bird has trouble going through the wires. However, once one decides to take a step back and review the cage as a whole rather than focusing on each wire one by one, then one will understand why the bird does not go anywhere. According to Frye (1983), the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers. It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognise: "one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced." (Frye, 1983, pp. 12-13), as cited by (Brennan, 2014, pp. 5-6).

The metaphor of a 'ton of feathers' describes the idea of having a single feather on an individual is harmless, but a ton of feathers is deadly. This analogy explains why one does not mind or even notice one or two micro-inequities, but a huge number of them can add up and can cause one to notice or matter (Brennan, 2014).

Another metaphor that Brennan (2014) quotes is of 'boiling frogs'. It said that when one throws a frog into boiling hot water, it will quickly jump out. However, if one turns up the heat gradually, one can boil frogs alive because the small increase in temperature each time is not sufficient for them to get out of the water quickly. This metaphor is used to show and describe how a person who is a victim of harm does not notice if each individual increase in harm is small or big enough; hence, toxic work environments can creep up on someone, unnoticed, just like the warm water creeping up on the frog.

2.3.2. CRITIQUE OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

Equity is seen to be an individual's psychological nature in relation to workplace justice in the context of interaction and the way process and procedures occur within an environment (Robbins & Sanghi, 2010). It is thus, the consciousness of how one is treated in the workplace, either in a fair or unfair manner. One's perception to equity and one's response to this perception is a critical aspect in managing one's commitment in the workplace. The feeling of fairness and the expectation of being treated in a fair and in a positive manner is treated as an innate characteristic of humans, but there

are some ideological contestations that such feelings that human possess are also learnt (Eketu, 2018). Eketu (2018) identifies equity as one's feelings of how they are fairly treated in work-related issues, however he also contends that an individual's perception of the workplace occurs in the psychological plain and determined by experience. The responses that individuals perceive to the issue of equity tend to create serious concerns to managers. The issues on arguments in equity tend to centre in an individual's perception which is seen to be a psychological attribute. Also, the referent upon which equity is evaluated may not be interpreted by the perceiver in a proper manner thus creating the perception of subtle negative behaviour.

2.4. THE NATURE OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

Chaudhry, Pathan, Arshad and Butt (2017) argue that there has been an increase in slighter forms of workplace interpersonal mistreatment which can be categorised as workplace bullying and workplace civility. They state that these behaviours of mistreatment include verbal aggression, disrespect, and humiliation (Chaudhry, et al., 2017). These kinds of behaviours relate well to how one would describe the concept of micro-inequities in the workplace. When dealing with the nature of micro-inequities within the context of this study, the researcher looked at four possible classifications of micro-inequities and further included variables such as emotions, perceptions and attitudes which were abstract concepts that had an intervening impact on the relationship between the four classifications and the effects receivers went through once micro-inequities were felt by them.

2.4.1. CLASSIFICATIONS OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

There are various forms of unconscious bias that fall under the concept of micro-inequities such as interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviours, rankism and deviant behaviour as seen in figure 1.1, Block A). This study was limited to these four classifications as it was of interest to the researcher and brought the research problem of this study to light.

2.4.1.1. Interpersonal discrimination

Presently, it is illegal to overtly discriminate against a person's innate characteristics such as race, gender, and disability. South African legislation makes provision for socially unacceptable discrimination within the workplace. Workplace discrimination, however, still takes place and often occurs in more subtle ways than overt ways (Jones, Arena, Nittrouer Alonso & Lindsey, 2017). These subtle forms of discrimination are hard to detect and are often unconscious; therefore, making it difficult to take legislative action (Rowe, 2008). "Some scholars have argued that prejudiced individuals rely on subtle discrimination to express bias in a way that does not explicitly violate social norms and expectations for equality." (Jones, et al., 2017, p. 52).

Jones, et al. (2016), explain that subtle or interpersonal discrimination can be defined as negative or ambivalent conduct or treatment performed toward social minorities on the basis of their minority status which is not necessarily conscious in nature or carry any form of intention. This supports Rowe's (1990) definition of micro-inequities that they are unconscious and at times carry no intention. In addition, interpersonal discrimination can be conceptualised as behaviours which are shown in an unintentional manner which form part of everyday interactions which may take the form of jokes, avoidance and disrespectful treatment (Van Laer & Janssen, 2011).

Rowe (1990) strongly believes that interpersonal discrimination is the projection of one's own negative feelings which one feels about oneself, and these behaviours that one exerts are used as "a scapegoating process which is supported by myths and by selective perception" towards others (Rowe, 1990, pp. 5-6).

Interpersonal discrimination can be further characterised as negative non-verbal, para-verbal, or verbal behaviours that occur in social interactions which may be subtle in nature and often difficult to prevent as it is not legislated (O'Brien, McAbee, Hebl, & Rodgers, 2017), and this statement is supported by Rowe (2008) as she states that there is no legislative action for such behaviours as compared to formal discrimination. Subtle discrimination can include rude and hostile behaviour towards those who are seen to be 'different' as Rowe (1990) suggests. The indirect nature of interpersonal discrimination has a negative impact in the way an individual may perform in his or her work-related tasks (O'Brien, et al., 2016).

Interpersonal discrimination is measured by how long individuals can interact with one another, the number of words used within the conversation, the perceived interest of individuals during their interaction and the extent to which individuals are helpful, nervous or motivated for the duration of the interaction (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King and Gray, 2016).

Examples of subtle discrimination measures include aspects such as being treated with more politeness than others; individuals thinking or acting as if they are more superior to others; anticipating that someone will produce work below required standards; and having individuals respond to other individuals as if they are 'perplexed or scared' by their presence (Jones, et al., 2016).

Interpersonal discrimination may be viewed as being a series of unimportant events where one is seen to make minor issues into major ones which have little impact (Vilian, 1999); however, O'Brien, et al., (2016) disagree as their findings show that minor issues add up to bigger issues which bring about a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of an individual. Furthermore, the Jones et al., (2016) study affirms that effects of subtle discrimination are much larger than overt discrimination and that it should be given as much attention as overt discrimination.

It is important that people are more aware of their actions and its impact on others as it could minimise the exposure of interpersonal discrimination (Tshakhuma, 2014). Shih, Young and Bucher (2013), argue that subtle discrimination continues in organisations because diversity initiatives target more overt forms of discrimination which are simply identifiable and tend to overlook discrimination that is more indirect in nature. Yet another reason could be that there are usually legal policies in organisations to deal with more direct discrimination as compared to indirect discrimination (Shih, et al., 2013), thus it may constitute a major challenge for Human Resource managers to deal with employees who are usually affected by this form of indirect discrimination namely, micro-inequity.

2.4.1.2. Toxic behaviour

Holloway and Kusy (2010, p. 26) define toxic behaviours as “interpersonal acts which convey rudeness and disregard for others in the workplace and add that these behaviours violate social norms”. Tshakhuma (2014) supports Holloway and Kusy’s (2010) definition by stating that toxic behaviours are behaviours that involve disrespecting others where an individual may undermine or ridicule another person. In other words that can be used interchangeably to describe toxic behaviour in the workplace that would include uncivility or disruptive behaviour (McClure, 2009).

Some toxic behaviours from managers include slamming doors, sulking, taking no responsibility for one’s behaviour, make decisions based on one’s own convenience and seem rigid and controlling (McClure, 2009). Other examples include yelling, using abusive language, belittling peers, insulting or intimidating peers, and being sarcastic especially in a rude or disrespectful manner (Holloway & Kusy, 2010). Tastan (2017) revealed that most people had a high perception of humiliations, gossiping, aggression and incivility among their colleagues in the workplace; and the findings of the study supported the general idea that many negative acts, situations, behaviours, perceptions and organisational factors can be evaluated under the ‘toxic workplace environment’ (Tastan, 2017).

A study done by Cornerstone (2015) found that toxic behaviour is contagious such that good employees are 54% more likely to quit when they work with a toxic employee; toxic employees have a far stronger impact on voluntary attrition than they do on day-to-day workplace performance; in other words, toxic employees are significantly more productive than their nontoxic counterparts and they are able to complete tasks quicker, which means that toxic employees influence non-toxic employees to a point where they are no longer productive. Furthermore, toxic behaviours predict low scores on attendance and the lack of dependability at work (Conerstone, 2015).

There are three types of toxic behaviours, namely: Shaming, passive hostility and team sabotage. According to Kusy and Holloway (2009) and Holloway and Kusy (2010), shaming includes humiliation, sarcasm and mistake pointing; passive hostility refers to acts of subtle insults,

stubbornness, having difficulty accepting feedback, and disregards opinions of others; and lastly, team sabotage includes taking the credit for another person's work, withdrawing efforts, not sharing information, and using authority to punish others. These behaviours have a potential negative impact on individuals who are on the receiving end as it may bring about feelings of devaluation, demotivation and demoralisation which are, in fact, similar impacts that are felt when one experiences micro-inequities.

Workplace culture has a great impact on what behaviours are portrayed as in the workplace, in other words "toxic people thrive only in a toxic system" (Kusy & Holloway, 2009, p. 10). One needs to understand the nature and the dynamics of the toxic situation in order for one to intervene and make necessary changes; however, they also state that simply intervening with a toxic person is not effective since "toxic personalities are part of the complex system which becomes the source of their power" (Kusy & Holloway, 2009, p. 10). Holloway and Kusy (2010) also state that having a code of conduct is not sufficient to deal with incivility hence it is essential for human resource practitioners to implement cohesive and comprehensive strategies at all levels.

2.4.1.3. **Rankism**

Rankism insults the dignity of employees by treating them as if they are invisible which therefore demoralises and devalues them (Fuller, 2010). Rankism is a collective term used to describe various ways one can be abused in the context of power and hierarchical difference (Fuller, 2012). Rowe (2008) supports this notion when she mentions that micro-inequities usually exist when an individual uses his or her power over another individual causing the individual to feel ill-treated.

Fuller (2004) assumes that positional power is the only factor which contributes to failing to treat people with dignity; however, Brennen (2007) argues that some people fail to recognise the human dignity and self-worth of an individual regardless of power within a relationship.

Rankism affects people of every race, gender, age and class. Just as micro-inequities can be seen everywhere, Fuller (2010) states that most individuals have been both victims and perpetrators of rankism, in different contexts. The problem lies in the fact that rankism is hardly challenged. When an individual suffers devaluation in their dignity, it usually builds up to indignation or boils down to violence in the workplace. The most common and basic form of rankism is interpersonal bullying.

D'Cruz and Noronha (2013) state that workplace bullying embodies subtle negative behaviours which include aggression, hostility, intimidation and harm, generally is portrayed by 'persistence', displayed by an individual or group both publicly or privately, in real or implicit forms. Furthermore, these negative behaviours occur in the context of an existing or growing unequal power relationship. Workplace bullying, thus, can be known as the most common form of rankism because these two

concepts iterate the issue of an abuse of power where one, who is at a higher rank or position, uses one's power or authority to one's advantage in a negative manner by using negative behaviours.

Interpersonal bullying or rankism can be demonstrated in various ways namely downwards from superior to subordinate, which is the most common form (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011); upwards which is from subordinate to superior (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2013); and cross-level co-bullying where peers join superiors in bullying (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2013).

Cross and Carbery (2016) found that employees with lower levels of education experienced higher levels of workplace bullying as compared to those with higher levels of education. This was consistent with the findings of (Ortega, et al., 2009) where it was found that employees with lower skills reported more bullying experiences than did their managers and supervisors. It was also revealed that this trend was based on the assumption of occupational categories where people with low status jobs with lower levels of decision-making power had a greater risk of workplace bullying as compared to their professional counterparts, like supervisors and managers.

Pietersien (2007) states that research findings done in Western countries show that downwards bullying occurs regardless of the rank one occupies; and verbal and indirect negative acts are the most common forms of interpersonal bullying within the work environment (Pietersien, 2007).

Interpersonal bullying reflects an unbalanced power between victims and perpetrators (Einarsen, et al., 2011). It contributes to the growing powerlessness of the victim who overtime perceives himself or herself as having no way out of the situation of being bullied (Branch, et al., 2013). This means that even at first targets may feel as strong as the bully, however gradually realises that they are in a weaker position thus creates feelings of devaluation, and low self-esteem (Branch, et al., 2013; Einarsen, et al., 2011).

Bullying shows in a wide variety of behaviours such as "public humiliation, criticism, verbal abuse, intimidation, inaccurate accusations, spreading of rumours, ignoring people for long periods, and undermining a victim's organisational status" (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012, pp. 1-2). According to these authors, bullying hinders group communication and creates a hostile work environment; thus, it impacts on the overall reputation of the company. Interpersonal bullying also includes elements such as lack of recognition and isolation (Pietersien, 2007).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions can be used as a framework to theorise rankism; however, for the purpose of this study only one of the dimensions will be used, namely 'power distance' which strongly relates to rankism. This dimension describes the extent to which less powerful people accept that they can be dominated by more powerful people (Hofstede, 2011). This dimension represents inequality and unbalanced power between victims and perpetrators where one may occupy a higher rank than the other and uses one's power and authority to one's advancement.

Employees who are subjected to interpersonal bullying go through severe emotional and physical strain which decreases their well-being (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). D’Cruz and Noronha (2013) report that issues of lowered self-esteem, self-hate, insomnia and anger are usually experienced by those who are targeted. Alarming, they argue that targets who go through these effects are unable to successfully apply problem-focused coping strategies hence one can see the importance of the Human Resource department to ensure the well-being of employees are taken care off and that strategies that are put in place are well applied and are effective in its implementation.

2.4.1.4. Deviant behaviour

When individuals lack motivation to conform to rules and policies of a specific organisation, one can consider that they become deviant in his or her behaviour and in turn the negative behaviour displayed threatens the well-being of the organisation (Rogojan & Windersperger, 2009).

Social exchange theory postulated by George Homans (1958) states that one’s perceptions and personal feelings may develop negative attitudes which turn into negative behaviours. Employees’ personal feelings, desires, discernments and perceptions, qualities and so forth may build up some negative demeanours towards the work and the organisation which at that point causes negative conduct and behaviour in the workplace (Malisetty, 2015).

Robinson and Bennett (1995) introduced a framework which introduced a typology of deviant behaviour which included an interpersonal aspect. The interpersonal aspect is divided into political deviance and personal aggression. These sub-divisions relate to micro-inequities with regards to social engagement and hostility within the workplace.

Political deviance is “the behaviour as engagement in social interaction that puts other individuals at a personal or political disadvantage” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 566). Workplace incivility, showing favouritism, gossiping about co-workers, and competing non-beneficially are forms of political deviance and cause disharmony within the workplace (Rogojan & Windersperger, 2009). Workplace incivility is disrespectful behaviour that harms victims either in an intentional or unintentional way (Malisetty, 2015). Examples may include, being interrupted while one is speaking, not being thanked when offering help and going through humiliation. Rogojan and Windersperger (2009) argue that those that are still targets of political deviance are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs and consequently more likely to resign.

On the other hand, personal aggression is behaving in an aggressive or hostile manner towards other individuals (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). “Sexual harassment, rape, verbal abuse, physical assaults, sabotaging the work of co-workers, stealing from co-workers, destroying property of coworkers, and endangering co-workers are forms of personal aggression” (Rogojan & Windersperger, 2009, p. 16).

It was found that another form of deviant behaviour is when employees come to work late (Chirasha & Mahapa, 2012). They reveal that it is the most common type of deviant behaviour in various organisations as it affects production with regard to the outputs produced due to hours lost when employees engage in non-work related activities. Furthermore, they found that females tend to gossip more than males where most females reported that they have heard co-workers gossiping as compared to their male counterparts. From their study it was concluded that gossiping is the most common type of political deviance in organisations.

There are three dynamics that cause misunderstandings and conflict among different people. These dynamics explain that all employees are different from one another and what causes one employee to act in an unethical manner as compared to another employee. These dynamics have been suggested by (Woods, 2010) which include, respect and disrespect; recognition and identity and resentment and backlash.

Woods (2010) describes disrespect as blatant behaviour and subtle in nature. The messages sent when disrespect is used may be unintentional and unrecognised by the sender. Rowe (1990) labelled this as 'micro-inequities'. When this dynamic is not understood, conflict can become unbearable (Woods, 2010).

Recognition and identity are the second dynamic. Woods (2010) suggests that people should understand that individuals are unique even though they may form part of a similar group. People find it easy to classify others in the way that suits them, and do not even realise how others interpret the message.

Lastly, resentment and backlash can be seen to be deep-rooted in current political changes where people who were advantaged in the past are currently feeling reverse discrimination when the disadvantaged are given opportunities (Woods, 2010; Tshakhuma, 2014). Furthermore, instead of making progress on diversity, people exhibit hate among one another; and, the way one perceives and interprets these messages plays a huge role in having negative behaviours continue.

2.4.2. EMOTIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

An individual's emotions, perceptions and attitudes serve as intervening abstract concepts between the classifications of micro-inequities and the effects that one may feel because of micro-inequities as shown in figure 1.1 chapter one. These variables have an influence on the relationship between the nature and effects of micro-inequities, meaning that when these variables are present in the mind of an individual it can determine how one may interpret a message and how one may deal with the impact of the message; thus, having an impact on organisational behaviour and an organisation's culture.

Perception, emotions and attitudes, as psychological constructs are associated with one another (Cross & Carbery, 2016); and, despite the differences, most of them share common properties and have a pervasive impact on organisational behaviour. The way one perceives a situation; the attitudes and emotions that may be felt at the time a message is being sent can determine the negativity or positivity of the situation.

2.4.2.1. **Emotions**

Emotion is a psychological or social response to a stimulus within a given situation or environment. Gopinath (2011) further defines emotion as a state of feeling, usually a complicated state of feeling, which go hand in hand with psychological stimulation and overt behaviours; however, Andrieş (2011) disagrees with Gopinath (2011) and argues that emotion can bring about not only overt behaviours but covert behaviours too. This means that when information is processed in the mind of an individual it results in an emotion being felt by the individual at both conscious and unconscious levels (Andrieş, 2011). Along these lines, the emotions one may encounter are displayed in one's consciousness, while different sentiments stay hidden and misunderstood in the unconscious spectrum of one's brain (Hadzhieva, 2017).

Emotions create a state of readiness. The episodes one may experience are usually communications to oneself. They make one mindful of occasions that may influence one's survival and well-being. A few feelings, for example outrage, shock and fear, are especially solid triggers that request one's attention, intrude on one's line of reasoning, and produce the inspiration to follow up or act on one's environment (McShane & Van Glinow, 2009).

Emotions can be expressed through certain facial expressions, gestures or postures hence emotions can be primarily described as expressive (Gopinath, 2011). Cowie, Sussman and Ben-Ze'ev (2013) clarify that feelings and emotions are internal whilst expression is more public. An individual, therefore, usually expresses a positive or negative state of feeling and behaves in a certain manner in relation to how he or she feels based on a positive or negative situation (Van Kleef, 2014). This relates to interpersonal discrimination, as Rowe (1990) argues that the way one behaves is the projection of one's own negative feelings which one feels about oneself, and these behaviours that one exerts are used as "a scapegoating process which is supported by myths and by selective perception" towards others through the way it is expressed (Rowe, 1990, pp. 5-6).

Cowie, et al. (2013) argue that emotion affects not only what people do, but also the way they do it. They further state that "some of the effects flow from underlying shifts in the way people perceive and think under the influence of emotion" (Cowie, et al., 2013, p. 20). O'Neil and Hastings (2011) clarify that workplace deviance stems from perceived injustice and negative emotions which play a role in some negative behaviours such as deviant behaviour or toxic behaviour in the workplace;

therefore, it is evident that emotions arise from an internal or external stimulus which can make an individual behave in a certain manner, more often in a negative way (O'Neil & Hastings, 2011).

Emotion influences the way one thinks, makes decisions, acts and interacts within a given environment (Izard, 2010). Porath and Pearson (2012) identified anger, fear and sadness to be emotional responses to workplace incivility. Porath and Pearson (2012) proposed that targets who experience personal impact of workplace incivility are likely to experience a greater level of anger, fear and sadness. These essential negative feelings are of great significance to people, yet their experience and expression are for the most part shunned in the work environment and are disregarded in organisational research.

2.4.2.1.1 Anger

Anger is a response to an injustice exerted on a target for which the perpetrator is responsible. Targets get angry by feeling violated when their identity was threatened or challenged, or their self-esteem was looked down upon (Porath & Pearson, 2012).

2.4.2.1.2 Fear

Fear is an existential menace and a target responds with fear when he or she feels threatened or uncomfortable (Totterdell & Niven, 2014). Within the workplace, employees start to feel that their expectations about interpersonal connections have been violated and even start to question their responsibilities. Due to feeling violated, there may be an increased response of fear (Porath & Pearson, 2012).

2.4.2.1.3 Sadness

Sadness usually stems from negative events which are considered as uncontrollable such as subtle negative behaviour (Totterdell & Niven, 2014). Targets usually feel a sense of hopelessness, or humiliation as they feel devalued by a negative behaviour such as toxic incivility or interpersonal discrimination.

Porath and Pearson (2012) state that fear and sadness that were associated with actual experiences of workplace incivility were associated with behaviours that could negatively impact individuals and organisations; furthermore, they found that the consequences of fear and sadness were worsened when targets were of a lower organisational status. They state that emotions strongly relate to the way one perceives another individual or situation.

2.4.2.2. Perceptions

Perception is the procedure by which people sort out and translate their tangible impressions in order to give meaning to their surroundings; however, what is perceived can be considerably poles apart from reality (Catenacci, 2017). Behaviour is based on one's perception or belief of what reality is, and not reality itself (Pearson, 2017); therefore, this means that just because an individual believes

something is true does not necessarily mean it is actually true. It is imperative to note that perception, as a construct, is associated with emotions and attitudes; and it further influences the way people comprehend the world around them and triggers them to behave accordingly.

When individuals draw their perceptions on incomplete information and inadequate observation, it affects the way they make decisions and it influences how they will behave (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). This means that individuals do not see or understand everything that occurs in a specific circumstance. Essentially, they have a tendency to be specific in what they take care of and what they see. This selectivity in the perceptual process prompts the propensity or bias to see a certain thing and not another. Parzefall and Salin (2010) call this 'perceptual bias'.

Pearson (2017) states that individuals hold perceptions that are simply experienced within their life and learned from parents, culture and the media. She further asserts that it is essential to know that people's perceptions vary; therefore, different individuals can perceive the same thing in unique ways. Catenacci (2017) agrees with Pearson (2017) but additionally emphasises that a person's attitude, intention, interest, experience and anticipations are elements that impact how a situation, or another person is perceived. Within the organisational context, "individual perceptions shape organisational behaviour and consequently shape organisational success" (Elnaga, 2012, p. 56).

Micro-inequities are triggered by the perception of difference (Rowe & Giraldo-Kerr, 2017). A work situation can be experienced positively or negatively depending on an individual's perception of status and power within work or personal groups (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012); thus, in relation to micro-inequities, if an individual negatively experiences a situation based on a negative perception about power difference and status, he or she can resort to negative behaviour such as workplace bullying. The victim, however, could perceive himself or herself as powerless overtime because he or she may feel like there is no way out of the situation therefore starts behaving in a violent manner or starts to go through depression. Consequently, the way employees perceive their work situations affect their productivity the most (Robbins, Judge, Millet & Boyle, 2014; Catenacci, 2017)

The behaviour one exerts is due to a positive or negative perception which is also influenced by emotions (Cowie, et al., 2013). Ultimately, this reverts back to the concept of micro-inequities where Rowe (1990) states that micro-inequities occur whenever people are perceived to be 'Different'; and when Young (2014) says that this perception of being 'different' stems from diversity within the workplace.

Otara (2011), states that there are a number of factors that influence the perceptual process of an individual. These factors include habit and motivation. Habits are formed slowly and unconsciously and when these habits are formed, individuals perceive their surroundings according to their habits.

Motivational aspects drive an individual's sensitivity to his or her surroundings which he or she considers as relevant to his or her needs in relation to his or her past experiences.

Moreover, it is essential to take note that values, beliefs and attitudes play a huge role in one's perceptual process (Otara, 2011). In work environments, the amount of energy one puts forth into a task is directly related to the perception one has about a given task (Robbins, et al., 2014); therefore, in relation to micro-inequities, the type of negative behaviour one shows is directly related to one's belief about power distance, social norms, policies and procedures and subtle discrimination.

2.4.2.3. Attitudes

Attitude is described as a personal understanding of something either through an opinion or general feeling. This construct shows an individual's degree of like or dislike of an object, person or environment. Attitudes are either positive or negative; and can be categorised as implicit or explicit (Cherry, 2018).

Attitudes comprise emotions, perceptions, and behaviours (Singh, 2016). McShane and Van Glinow (2009, p. 105), state that "attitudes represent the cluster of beliefs, assessed feelings, and behavioural intentions toward a person, object, or event". Attitudes comprise three components: beliefs, emotions, and intentions through behaviour (McShane & Van Glinow, 2009). A belief is the established perception that people have about their surroundings; emotions are the positive or negative evaluations about one's surroundings; and behavioural intentions affect the motivation one has to engage in a particular manner in relation to one's surroundings.

One's attitudes is influenced by the social world and the social world is influenced by one's attitudes (Shah & Gardner, 2008). The interaction between one's attitude and the social world can however be in conflict. This conflict is known as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance refers to any inconsistency between perception and behaviour (Shah & Gardner, 2008).

According to the social exchange theory, perceptions cause attitudes which ultimately cause positive or negative behaviours. In other words, personal feelings and beliefs may cause one to develop a negative attitude towards others in the workplace which then causes negative behaviour. Most employees develop negative attitudes which results in deviant behaviour (Malisetty, 2015).

Organisational misbehaviour starts with one's attitude towards the organisation as a whole and one's attitude towards people within the organisation. The attitude one portrays determines how one will behave and determines organisational success.

2.5. EFFECTS OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

As shown in Block B of figure 1.1, the nature and classification of micro-inequities bring about the different effects that employees experience which are caused by negative behaviours in the

workplace. When a micro-inequity is present, it could elicit different types of behaviours, or the same behaviours as their perpetrators; it could increase health issues such as depression; it causes low productivity, and a lack of engagement in the organisation; and workplace deviance.

What makes micro-inequities very problematic is that it consists of micro-messages that are hard to perceive for victims, targets and witnesses. When targets experience negative micro-messages, it is difficult to explain to other people why these negative behaviours pose such a huge problem to them (Richardson, 2017). Furthermore, Hills (2017) states that victims of micro-inequities, bystanders and employers find it hard to identify their injustices. When targets of these negative behaviours eventually recognise the various micro-messages, they find it very hard to explain to other people why these small happenings and behaviours pose a huge problem hence others belittle their effect. The total impact of these micro-inequities regularly prompts the notion of decreased self-esteem within employees, and eventually, causes a total withdrawal from others in the work environment. Therefore, this knock-on effect has a negative impact on the business in relation to decreased productivity and revenues.

According to Jones, et al. (2017), repeated exposure to mistreatment or subtle discrimination can build resilience. This means that targets may be less affected by subtle negative behaviours to the degree that these behaviours incur regularly. Essentially these authors state that this represents a psychological adaption where people subconsciously adapt and adjust to negative situations by adapting their expectations in line with the 'new norm' of negativity thus people become immune to the stressful experiences they encounter (Jones, et al., 2017).

In other words, people who are repeatedly treated in a negative manner might develop a 'thicker skin' over time. However, Rowe (2008) asserts that continued experience of micro-inequities creates unhappy cycles which range from a lowered self-esteem, poor work performance and possibly violence. Furthermore, Young (2014) signifies that micro-inequities have a long-term negative effect on people who experience it and in the long run can cause destructive situations. Whilst some people become immune to subtle behaviours, others do bear the long-term effects of micro-inequities.

Subtle discrimination was revealed by Jones, et al., (2016) likely to undermine organisational efforts that lead to worsened job attitudes, decreased performance and increased turnover. However, they also pointed out that subtle forms of discrimination are least damaging as compared to overt forms of discrimination in terms of meaningful outcomes.

Subtle discrimination can be stressful because it occurs more often than overt discrimination. Victims are confronted with these subtle behaviours daily and the effects of stress, decreased work performance and increased aggressive behaviour may build up and accumulate at a fast pace (King & Jones, (2017)).

Victims of bullying report to receive less social support from the Human Resources (HR) department in their organisation and are often pushed from person to person, which result in feelings of shame and possible relocation due to HR in some instances even supporting the bully instead of the victim (Upton, 2010). There is a significant association between the personality of an individual and exposure to interpersonal bullying in the workplace (Giorgi, Perminiene, Montani, FizPerez, Mucci and Arcangeli, 2016). A Norwegian study, with a sample size of 2000 employees, signified that people who are bullied were characterised by low self-esteem and social capability, furthermore, the study reported that there were high levels of anxiety in the work place (Giorgi, et al., 2016). In a study of 60 victims of interpersonal bullying, found that victims were more anxious, less assertive and had the inability to cope with their emotional distress (Giorgi, et al., 2016).

According to Perminiene, Kern and Perminas (2016) individuals who are more bossy, self-centred and controlling are frequently exposed to workplace bullying; on the other hand, Leyman (1996) disregarded the view that singular attributes of targets might be targets of interpersonal bullying and, rather, claimed that an individual may encounter real personality changes as an outcome and consequence of exposure to workplace bullying (direct or indirect) (Leymann, 1996)

Workplace deviance impacts on employees and the organisation. When deviant behaviour occurs in the workplace it creates unpleasant emotions, depression, increased anxiety and panic attacks, and tension among employees (Chirasha & Mahapa, 2012). According to Hunte, King, Hicken, Lee and Lewis (2013) perceived interpersonal discrimination is significantly associated with depressive symptoms and is strongly related to an individual's mental health and well-being. Rowe and Giraldo-Kerr (2017) also affirm that continuous experiences of micro-inequities can lead to depression and other health issues. Hostility, anger and lowered self-esteem also form part of the relationship between interpersonal discrimination and depression (Hunte, et al., 2013).

Rowe and Giraldo-Kerr (2017) concur with Chirasha and Mahapa (2012) and Hunte, et al. (2013); however, they additionally highlight that micro-inequities have a negative impact on employees' creativity and engagement in the workplace. Moreover, studies indicate that workplace turnover costs and low morale is associated to being treated unfairly (Rowe & Giraldo-Kerr, 2017).

Micro-inequities also have impact on the organisation. Organisations experience a decrease in employee productivity due to employees feeling criticised and humiliated; consequently, it increases a loss in production, legal costs and absenteeism (Upton, 2010). Tshakhuma (2014) further states that an organisation's image can be tarnished due to deviant workplace behaviour. Interpersonal discrimination can be linked to decreased organisational commitment and job satisfaction, in some instances interpersonal discrimination leads to deviant behaviour (Cortina, et al., 2011)

All in all, there are various effects that occur because of micro-inequities regardless of the different categories that the researcher has mentioned in the literature. Even though there are numerous effects that result from micro-inequities, the researcher found self-esteem, depression, loss in productivity, lack in engagement, increased absenteeism rates and loss in revenues to be the most prevailing effects of micro-inequities from an employee's perspective and from an organisational perspective.

2.6. INTERVENTIONS THAT WOULD REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF MICRO-INEQUITIES

Interventions and recommended solutions on reducing micro-inequities do exist. It is important that one accepts that micro-inequities do exist in organisations and it is addressed so that the damage it causes can be minimised. These possible solutions are depicted in figure 1.1, Block D, as a moderating concept, as it modifies the relationship from the time the micro-inequity is shown to the time the victim feels its affects. When this moderating concept is present, it brings about change in order to reduce the effects or prevent the different classifications of micro-inequities from occurring.

The challenge lies in the fact that there are no legal actions for micro-inequities in general because this phenomenon is based on subtle negative behaviours which are hard to prove (Rowe, 2008). The duty lies in the human resource department of the organisation to make people aware that this phenomenon actually exists and causes long term effects for the employees of the organisation and the organisation itself.

Stewart (2017) states that some researchers long believed that unconscious bias develop in one's life at an early stage. O'tara (2011) concurs with Stewart (2017) and justifies his statement because the unconscious mind can be influenced by surrounding communities, family background and one's own personal perceptions from past experiences. However, because people who perform negative subtle behaviours are unaware of their influence on others, they may be practically resistant to change; but Ceaser (2014) states that one can reshape one's implicit attitudes and perceptions or at least curb their effect on one's behaviour; thus it can said that one's attitudes, emotions and perceptions determines how one behaves and reacts within one's environment (Hadzhieva, 2017).

According to Stewart (2017), battling unconscious negative acts can be difficult; however, he further states that there are some strategies that can be implemented. These are, but not restrict to, enhancing one's understanding of the psychological basis of micro-inequities; replacing negative thoughts and perceptions of the minority group with positive thoughts by engaging more them more; obtaining diversity feedback from diverse members of the organisation especially in work-teams; and, increase affective empathy and perspective towards others.

Rowe (2008) and Stewart (2017) suggests that micro-affirmations are effective to reduce micro-inequities in the workplace. Micro-affirmations are small acts which open doors of opportunity with

regard to showing more care and graceful acts of listening to others. The basis of this concept lies in the practice of generosity, giving credit to others, providing comfort and support. According to Rowe (2008) and Young (2014), micro-affirmations help a person to build on strength and correct weakness and serve as a mentoring technique to improve situations where a negative behaviour has taken place. When micro-affirmations are practised, overtime it passes from one person to the next and essentially creating more harmony in the workplace; however, this also depends on peoples' attitude to practising good behaviour.

Subtle discrimination affects targets at every stage of and prior to the employment cycle, researchers have analysed compensatory strategies that the target can establish to lessen or eliminate the interpersonal discrimination he or she may experience (Singletary & Hebl, 2009). One compensatory strategy found to be especially effective at lessening interpersonal discrimination is showing increased positivist (Singletary & Hebl, 2009, p. 800). However, this strategy may not be a long-term arrangement given the exhausting emotional sensitivities that are involved (Jones, et al., 2017)

In addition, targets and culprits, non-target bystanders can likewise be negatively affected by seeing subtle discrimination taking place. In fact, research suggests that subtle discrimination can cause an increased negative effect, emotional discomfort, and distress in bystanders, and has likewise been shown to trigger negative feelings about one's organisation as a whole (Borders & Liang, 2011; Jones, et al., 2017)

Another intervention that bystanders may execute to re-mediate subtle discrimination is confronting the culprit and condemning their negative conduct. In spite of commonly negative connotations of the term confrontation, it is merely an expression of disapproval towards the victim of this indirect behaviour (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008); however, in some instances, confrontation may be discouraged as bystanders fear victimisation (Porath & Erez, 2009)

D'Cruz and Noronha (2013) emphasise that anti-bullying policies, building organisational culture, creating awareness and implementing training programmes serve as interventions to deal with interpersonal bullying. Rogoian and Windersperger (2009) concur with D'Cruz and Noronha's (2013) suggestions; however, they shed more light on deviant behaviour. They point out that background checks on employees should take place so that organisations know the type of employees that are employed. Furthermore, courses on ethics, surveillance techniques and training programmes were also suggested by Rogoian and Windersperger, (2009). Additionally, Rowe (1993) suggests the concept of networking with affected minorities to create an effective system because it provides skills training and contacts which enhances mentoring, provides personal support and creates a 'family' orientated bond.

O'Brien, et al., (2016) reveal in their study that the perceptions of individuals with regard to interpersonal discrimination lead to greater levels of stress; however, they state that this effect of stress can be moderated by manager and supervisor support as their study showed that those who had support felt lessened stress from interpersonal discrimination.

In relation to toxic behaviour in the workplace, (McClure, 2009) suggests that it is a good idea to ask a positive employee to do work with a toxic employee as the positive behaviour will be learned over time. He also suggests that one should be confronted about one's toxic behaviour and make one aware of the implications and effects of one's behaviour.

According to Rowe and Giraldo-Kerr, (2017), understanding micro-inequities is useful for improving one's very own conduct furthermore, it is useful for helping every individual counteract harm done by others. Initiatives to address the intent and impact of micro-inequities can raise awareness, help the individuals who are affected, and improve organisational structures to prevent micro-inequities from occurring. To further raise awareness, training and reading various publications is advised. Additionally, counselling and coaching can assist in the validation and understanding of one's feelings which is experienced as a result of micro-inequities and one major advantage of counselling sessions is that it provides confidentiality; moreover, a chance to develop remedies and change within the organisation and its structure (Jones et al., 2017)

Human resource managers and its department need to have effective psychological and counselling measures to help victims with their psychological effects of micro-inequities followed by educational initiatives and initiating team dynamics within work teams (Wright, 2013). Rowe (2008) further affirms that the topic of micro-inequities should be included in the organisation's employee attitude surveys, company newsletter, staff meetings and training initiatives. Furthermore, counselling and coaching helps validate and understand the feelings of victims and essentially one-on-one sessions provide confidentiality and a chance to develop a plan of action to remedy the damage caused (Rowe & Giraldo-Kerr, 2017)

The interventions that could be put in place to reduce micro-inequities in the workplace are countless, however the prevailing interventions include training, counselling, the implementation of policies and making employees aware of the concept of micro-inequities.

2.7. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the literature that there is a growing interest in the concept of micro-inequities which affect the organisation and its employees especially in relation to organisational behaviour. Micro-inequities have been defined as small unconscious acts which cause the targets to feel

devalued and unrecognised. Constructs such as emotions, perception and attitudes were discussed as intervening variables as they are associated with one another and explains the intensity to which one may feel a negative behaviour or see a negative behaviour taking place. The effects of micro-inequities were further discussed and recommended possible interventions were proposed by other researchers to deal with micro-inequities within the workplace. In the following chapter the research methodology adopted will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter comprised an in-depth discussion of literature concerning micro-inequities within the workplace. This chapter reviews the research methodology that the researcher utilised within the study. Research methodology refers to the various processes that the researcher has adopted in order to successfully complete the study (Brookshier, 2018).

3.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The sections that follow within this chapter discusses the methods that were adopted in order to help the researcher reach and attain the objectives of this study which were stated in chapter one of this study. The overall objectives of this study were the following:

- To explore the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the manufacturing company
- To determine how micro-inequities affect employees in the manufacturing company
- To ascertain the manufacturing company's support structures to manage micro-inequities.

3.3. INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Interpretivism emphasises that people differ within different physical settings because they create different meanings within different contexts in which they relate. The purpose of an interpretive philosophy in research is to produce new, more vast understandings and translations of the social world.

This philosophy was thus adopted in order to gain an insight of the reality of employees regarding the concept of micro-inequities in the workplace with the aim of interpreting this phenomenon through the eyes of the participants and creating a value-bound study in order to promote a conducive working environment and increasing productivity as stated and shown in chapter one. Qualitative research is usually associated with an interpretive philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011); the researcher has therefore adopted a qualitative approach as seen in the section that follows.

3.4. RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two types of approaches to research, namely: qualitative and quantitative. A quantitative approach focuses on the quantity of things and statistical patterns of a data set from which a researcher then draws conclusions and tests a theory which consist of variables (Yilmaz, 2013). A quantitative approach, however, does not always represent the full complexity of human experience and human perceptions, uses a larger sample, and may further give a false impression of the similarity within a given sample because it does not reveal why or how a situation unravels instead reveals to what extent it may happen (Flick, 2015); for this reason, through comparing the differences between the two approaches, the researcher chose a qualitative approach for this study.

Due to the abstract, complex and sensitive nature of this topic, the researcher needed to get an in-depth and personal understanding of participants. The researcher had to capture the real essence and experiences of participants regarding their sensitivities with respect to micro-inequities. A qualitative approach could allow the researcher to tap into the real-life experiences of employees unlike a quantitative approach, as a quantitative approach is more concerned with attaining factual and numerical information rather than descriptive and engaging information. Furthermore, this approach was used to describe variation in responses regarding micro-inequities; to describe between different concepts and relationships; and, to describe individual experiences and describe group norms within the organisation

3.4.1. Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is a form of social action which gathers information about human experiences and the reality of things (Ngulube, 2015). Qualitative research assumes that “knowledge is not independent of the researcher, but it is socially constructed, and that reality is neither fixed nor static” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 315). Additionally, this approach is known to be flexible, and looks at the bigger picture of a given situation which allows individuals to voice out their perceptions and their social perspective.

This approach has many advantages such as: providing rich and detailed information about the population; given a vast and diverse pool of perceptions; data collection requires a limited number of participants; and the research process can be conducted with a limited number of resources (Ngulube, 2015). On the other hand, there are also disadvantages which include: the lack of generalisability throughout the whole population; results of the data set are not objectively verifiable; and it is prone to researcher bias (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

The researcher chose a qualitative approach because it allows deeper exploration of the concept of micro-inequities in the workplace and it assisted the researcher to achieve the research objectives through acknowledging real-life situations and view-points; understand the experiences or conditions

of participants from a personal perspective; and analysing text and interpretation of the interviews to learn about their personal knowledge.

Despite the disadvantages, the researcher chose this approach because it allowed the researcher to get to know the participants of the study and to get to know their interpretations and experience of micro-inequities in the workplace (Mohajan, 2018); additionally, this design allowed the researcher to explore the sensitivities of micro-inequities in greater detail which tapped into the emotions and real-life experiences of participants which a quantitative design could not do. It further allowed the participants to share their social view point on the phenomenon and instead of fitting their answers into predetermined classifications, the researcher had the ability to possibly discover other factors in relation to the effects and interventions of micro-inequities in the workplace.

3.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is a plan or outline for a study which provides an overall framework for data collection. It can also be known as a tactical framework of action which serves to bridge the gap between a researcher's research questions and the implementation of the research approach and strategy (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

3.5.1. Exploratory Research

An exploratory design was of great use to the researcher as it formed the basis of allowing one to explore the concept of micro-inequities in more detail using a small sample size (Swanson, 2015). Since micro-inequities have not been widely studied within a South African context, this design also helped the researcher gain more insight and increased the body of knowledge from a South African perspective which provided a wide perspective within a specific social setting. This design further generated more viewpoints from participants and proved that this study will be feasible enough to continue with in future. It did not aim to test a hypothesis, but it asked how a theory or hypothesis can be explained, and it acknowledged how meaningful the explanation is (Reiter, 2017)

Additionally, exploratory research allowed the researcher to be flexible in finding answers to the study's research questions as it provided participants the opportunity to clarify their experiences and voice out their opinions about micro-inequities. Lastly, this design was chosen as it can assist one in understanding concepts and often directs future research (Roller, 2011). The researcher used a specific research strategy within the exploratory research design, namely a case study approach

3.5.2. Case Study

The researcher used a case study approach to understand complex issues surrounding microinequities and it made the researcher to "go beyond statistical evaluations" showing an understanding of behavioural conditions through the participants' perspective (Phelan, 2011, p. 222). In addition, the

researcher used a specific company as the case study which acknowledged a microscopic view of micro-inequities within the organisation which brought forth clarity of the phenomenon and the context in which it was studied (Yazan, 2015). The drawback of this strategy, however, is that the researcher could not make generalisations with all other companies in South Africa; despite this drawback, this approach provided deeper and more insightful perspective from personal experiences and/or witnessed experiences of micro-inequalities which narrowed down micro-inequities, as a concept, into few researchable examples (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016); and to further find solutions to deal with micro-inequities within the workplace. The researcher used an exploratory case study using a cross-sectional time horizon for the data collection.

3.5.3. Cross-sectional time horizon

This study adopted a cross-sectional time horizon as the researcher wanted to find out the opinions and experiences of the employees at a specific point in time rather than finding out how their opinion and experiences have changed over time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) with regards to microinequities within the workplace. A time frame of only three (3) days were used to collect data from participants to answer the research questions and to achieve the research objectives. This time horizon allowed simplicity within this study and allowed the researcher to be resourceful for the collection of data (Sedgwick, 2014).

3.6. STUDY SITE

The company requested that all information revealed about them were to be kept limited as they would like to remain anonymous. Not providing information about the company was a deliberate attempt to protect their identity as giving such descriptive information allows one to identify the study site that was used immediately especially if one resides within the organization's area. However, limited information has been provided below without indulging the name of the company.

This study was conducted in the city of Pietermaritzburg, in an urban area named Edendale. The study site is a manufacturing company which specialises in making standard and customised tools. This study site was chosen because of their diverse employee base and the study site is near to the researcher's residential area thus traveling expenses was not incurred.

3.6.1. Significance of study site

South African organisations are very diverse in nature (Meyer, 2017); and the manufacturing company that was selected by the researcher concurs with Meyer (2017). This company includes people of all races, both genders, and people of different economic backgrounds as well as social backgrounds. The wide-ranging characteristics of the population ensured that the researcher got

views from different perspectives which may produce a richness in data in the final findings of the study.

3.7. TARGET POPULATION

A population is the total amount of elements within a group within a research project (Alvi, 2016). A population of three hundred and fifty-three (353) employees was targeted, which included managers at all levels and shop floor employees. This target population was specifically divided into different groups as shown in table 3.1 below.

Occupational levels	Male				Female				Total
	A	C	I	W	A	C	I	W	
Top management	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Middle management	1	0	7	7	0	0	0	5	20
Skilled	23	2	72	14	8	2	6	7	134
Semi-skilled	80	2	50	1	33	0	2	0	168
Unskilled	11	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	18
Grand Total	115	4	135	28	47	2	9	13	353

Table 3.1: Table showing the workforce and population profile of the study site

Table 3.1 shows the researcher's population from all occupational levels of the organisation where symbols 'A', 'C', 'I' and 'W' represent the diverse racial groups within the organisation namely: African, Coloured, Indian, and White.

3.8. SAMPLING

A sample is a subset of the entire population from which the researcher will proceed with data collection (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The sample for this study was chosen from a group of top managers, senior managers, professional main managers and other employees. Participants were chosen at all levels within the workplace and this allowed the researcher to gain an insight on different opinions, thoughts and situations about micro-inequities without limiting the possibility of richness in data just by focusing on one level instead of all the levels within the organisation.

Sample sizes for qualitative studies are much smaller than sample sizes for quantitative studies. A mean sample size of 31 would typically have a sample size of 10, 20, 30, and 40 (Mason, 2010).

Guetterman (2015), reminds us that six participants are adequate in a qualitative research study because it assists in understanding the essence of an experience. The ideal sample size for a qualitative study is one which is able to answer the research questions of the study (Guetterman, 2015). Therefore, this study consisted of thirteen (13) participants in total which were chosen from the population of 343 employees within the organisation from all occupational levels.

The sample size of 13 was chosen at the point of saturation. Data saturation involves adding new participants into a study until the data set is complete which is indicated by data that is redundant and replicated (Fush & Ness, 2015); in other words, data saturation is reached when there is enough information to continue with the study such that further coding is no longer feasible. Data saturation is not about the quantitative nature, but it is about the depth and richness of the data obtained (Fush & Ness, 2015). Therefore, the sample size of 13 was chosen at the point of data saturation because the researcher was getting responses that was too similar to previous responses; new responses were not innovative and alarming; and new responses were not adding anymore value to the coding process due to its redundant nature. Furthermore, the sample size was chosen based on the availability and convenience of participants; and data richness rather than representative perspectives (Maxwell, 2013). Table 3.2 shows the sample that was chosen based on data saturation at each occupational level.

Occupational levels	Total	Sample from each level
Senior management	3	1
Middle management	20	4
Skilled	134	3
Semi-skilled	168	3
Unskilled	18	2
Grand Total	343	13

Table 3.2: Table showing total sample size and samples chosen at each occupational level through convenience

The researcher had fewer participants under senior management because the nature of their jobs did not allow them to be readily available to the researcher at a specific given point in time. Most participants were readily available under the middle management, skilled and semi-skilled occupational levels. Samples at each level were chosen based on convenience, availability, the

willingness of the participants and considering the time limit within which this study should be completed.

3.9. CONVENIENCE SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Probability sampling is when every member of the population has a known chance of being chosen; on the other hand, non-probability sampling is when one uses one's own judgement and the population does not have an equal or known chance of being chosen (Alvi, 2016). For the purposes of this study, non-probability was chosen; furthermore, a method of convenience sampling was used.

This non-random sampling technique is utilised when the target population that meets certain criteria such as easy accessibility, geographical contiguity, availability within a given time, or voluntary participation are included in the study to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2015). Convenience sampling is affordable, simple to use and allows the researcher to access subjects who are readily available; on the other hand, one major downside is that this technique is likely to cause bias and is not representative of the whole population (Etikan, et al., 2015).

One of the major limitations in utilising this technique was that researcher could not get the views of other employees within the different branches of the company as those companies were costly to travel to; thus, the researcher may have missed the differences in employees with regards to their experiences of micro-inequities. Furthermore, the second limitation was that the inherent bias in using this technique meant that the sample that was chosen was unlikely to be representative of the population that was used in this study.

Lastly, some participants did not trust the intentions of the interviews that were conducted as they felt that it would be discussed with other parties of the organisation; however, the researcher tried to mitigate this limitation by ensuring that their privacy was a priority and that they can withdraw from the interview if they were not comfortable with the questions that were asked by the researcher. The researcher also ensured that the interviews were held in a location which was far away from the organisation to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and to ensure that they would not be victimised by other employees within the organisation.

Due to the simplicity, suitability and co-operative nature of this technique, the researcher chose to use it; furthermore, the researcher does not want to make generalisations hence convenience sampling was best suited for this study and for the organisation that was chosen as the study site.

3.10. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Qualitative studies require researchers to look deeper into issues and get a sense of reality through the eyes of the participants of the study. Qualitative studies have many methods of collecting data such as interviews, focus groups and observation (Hair, Celsi, Oritinau & Bush, 2013).

The data collection method that was adopted for this study was face to face interviews. A face to face interview is a conversation between two people where the aim is to gather descriptions, insights and different opinions on a topic of interest (Alshenqeeti, 2014); furthermore, this conversation provides in-depth information and different interpretations of a specific phenomenon (Hair, et al., 2013). The researcher used a semi-structured interview.

A semi-structured interview is flexible in nature and it allows the researcher to probe and expand participants' responses. In semi-structured interviews, there are predetermined questions on an interview guide which can be modified based on the interviewer's perception; every participant gets the same question, however there is flexibility in how the questions are asked; and is specifically useful in exploring the views, and experiences of a person towards something (Teijlingen, 2014). The researcher's interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

This method of interviews was the best option for the researcher as this study objectives are to explore the nature and effects of micro-inequities in the workplace. It allowed the researcher to gain insight on employees' experiences and opinions (Teijlingen, 2014). Furthermore, the nonverbal indicators assisted in evaluating the truthfulness and urgency of the topic of interest. Despite the positives of using this method, the challenge was in correctly interpreting responses from participants without allowing one's own preferred social response to override one's judgement; and taking into consideration that participants may lack trust in the interviewer with their privacy thus reducing the richness of data (Jamshed, 2014).

3.10.1. The interview process

The researcher first liaised with the Human Resource Manager of the organisation and obtained a list of the organisation's employees with their respective details. The researcher then contacted the employees and requested interviews based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. A timetable was drawn and interviews with all thirteen participants took place within a week.

Before an interview was conducted, the researcher had a brief conversation to set the tone and ensure that the participant is comfortable enough to proceed. Each participant was given an informed consent which included a small briefing on micro-inequities; information about how their privacy is of importance; and how their names, identity within the organisation and other personal details will be kept hidden through the use of fake names. The participants were also given a consent form and were told to sign only if they are willing to participate in the study and give permission to the

researcher to audio-record the interview session. Once permission was given, participants were asked if they know any about micro-inequities. All of the participants answered 'no', hence the researcher had to give a brief explanation about the concept, for the interview could proceed, which gave the participants more confidence to answer the interview questions and this briefing ensured that participants clearly understood the purpose of the study in order to continue.

Before the researcher could start recording, the researcher informed participants that there will be counselling available by the company's employee assistance programmes if the subject matter brings about emotional past experiences that the participant cannot emotionally handle.

An interview session was scheduled based on the availability of the participants; and was approximately 30 to 45 minutes long. Participants were made aware that they will be recorded, and they confirmed that they were comfortable with the process.

3.10.2. Data collection instrument

The researcher used audio- recordings to record the interview and while the interview was recorded, notes were also taken. The use of audio-recording allowed the researcher to refer to the interview based on convenience rather than relying on memory; it catered for storage for long period of time; and it was easy to use (Pawar, 2013). Recordings were then transcribed verbatim, and the transcriptions were used for data analysis using thematic content analysis.

3.11. DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is a range of processes and procedures whereby one takes qualitative data that has been collected and turns it into a form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of people' situations that one is investigating (Flick, 2013). Whilst this is a qualitative piece of work it is also a pragmatic piece of work and the researcher did not engage in purist qualitative work, that one would find in grounded theory or ethnography, this was a case study so for pragmatic reasons the researcher engaged in using frequencies to show how often a theme or code appeared. Frequencies have been adopted due to the qualitative nature of content analysis that was used as well as to show the variability in descriptions and experiences. Frequencies and percentages were used in this adopted qualitative methodology as the numerical data were based on descriptive statistics rather than predictive statistics ; furthermore, it was adopted on a contextual basis on the grounds of data richness in this study.

This study therefore adopted thematic content analysis to analyse data with the aim of analytically examining and breaking down real-life stories, which are in the form of text.

3.11.1. Thematic content analysis

Content analysis is a method of systematically coding and categorising large amounts of textual data with the aim of determining trends and patterns of words; and to “describe the characteristics of the document’s content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect” (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). This method of analysis allows the researcher to make valid inferences from data within its given context which further provides knowledge and new insights (Bengtsson, 2016). On the other hand, thematic analysis is the process of identifying themes within qualitative data (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). The goal is to provide patterns in the data that are important, interesting, and relate to the study’s questions and objectives (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013).

According to Bengtsson (2016) there are four stages of analysing data through content analysis which the researcher utilised within this study namely, de-contextualisation, re-contextualisation, categorisation, and compilation. The same set of analytical process used in content analysis is applied in thematic analysis with respect to naming themes, reviewing themes and searching for themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) which falls under Bengtsson’s (2016) stages namely, contextualisation and categorisation; hence, the researcher went through the similar process with both methods.

Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data and read through the transcribed text to get a broad picture of what the participants were saying. This had to be done before the researcher could break down the text into meaningful units that contain what the researcher needs in order to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. Once meanings were identified, it was labelled with a code which facilitated the identification of concepts and ideas regarding the phenomenon. This process is called de-contextualisation.

Secondly, the researcher checked whether or not all aspects of the content have been covered in relation to the research questions and objectives. Meaningful units were highlighted and taken note of; however, some un-highlighted units remained as some of the un-highlighted texts were also of importance to the researcher thus it also formed part of the analysis process. This was the re-contextualisation stage. Thirdly, units were condensed and categorised into broad groups and subgroups based on different aspects of the phenomenon. These groups were distinguished using themes and categories that emerged from the collected data. Categorisation of the data depended on the researcher’s objectives of the study.

Lastly, once the categories and themes were established the writing process began and the researcher had to immerse herself, to some extent, in the data in order to identify hidden meanings in the text. The researcher had to finally consider how the findings from the data collection of the study corresponded to the literature and make qualitative inferences based on the research questions and objectives.

Content analysis was used in conjunction to thematic analysis as these two methods aim to analyse and interpret data based on a specific phenomenon. Vaismoradi, et al. (2013, p. 400) state that “content analysis describes the characteristics of the document’s contents whereas thematic analysis is known as a method for purely identifying and reporting patterns (themes) within the data”. Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p. 3356) suggest that there are “no hard rules to make a theme and that themes are characterised by its significance”. Content analysis intends to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form whereas thematic analysis applies slight description to data sets. Therefore, the researcher used both analysis methods to not only analyse the characteristics of the content but to create themes within the content thus providing more detail.

In specific relation to thematic analysis, the researcher adopted the method depicted in figure 3.1 below from (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 153).

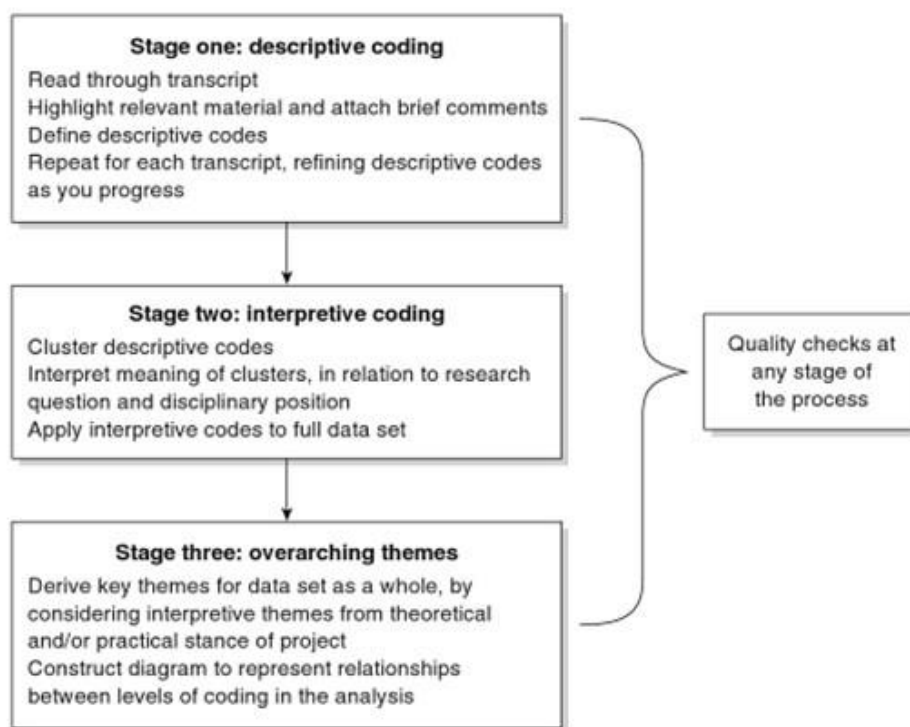


Figure 3.1: Diagrammatic representation of the thematic process adopted from King & Horrocks (2010, p. 153)

The researcher started the thematic analysis by first developing descriptive codes from the transcripts which related to the interview questions by analysing the content. Secondly, meanings of the identified codes were interpreted according to the research objectives and the conceptual framework; and were thus applied to the full data set. Lastly, main themes were derived from which the data was analysed. The following section will provide one with a better description and illustration of an example of how the theme ‘power play and its sub-themes were derived.

Stage 1: De-contextualisation and descriptive coding

The researcher developed descriptive codes from ground up which emerged within the study and were guided by the framework, in chapter one figure 1.1, that was developed by the researcher through the review of literature and thus comprised of the different classifications of micro-inequities; effects that employees dealt with; and, the participants' recommendations on how to reduce the effects of micro-inequities within the organisation. The interviews, which were recorded, were transcribed and then the researcher read through transcripts thoroughly to get idea of what each participant was saying.

The researcher then divided the text from each transcript into units in relation to the objectives and the interview guide. This was easy as the interview questions were guided by the research objectives. The researcher then highlighted appropriate words and codes that emerged with different colour pens to show the different perspectives of the participants based on what the researcher was aiming to achieve under each objective.

Stage 2: Contextualisation and Interpretive coding

The actual words of a participant were analysed to discover what the participant was trying to explain, in relation to the research objectives and the disciplinary position of the study, this interpretation was then applied throughout the whole data set. For example one participant stated ***“But for a supervisor to come when there's everyone around and say that this is what you did wrong, in front of everyone so I believe he could've took me away put my somewhere you know where it will just be the 2 of us cause you will find that people will make reference to whatever the supervisor pointed you your wrong doing.”*** And another participant stated

“So that they can call the person and tell him that what he did is wrong. Because you cannot, even if I've done something wrong, you cannot shout me in front of other workers.”

By reading these words the researcher could interpret that there were two parties involved, one that occupied a higher rank as compared to another. The one that occupied the higher rank exerted his or her power on the one who occupied a lower rank. By referring back to the literature, in chapter two, one can deem this to be rankism; however, there is an unbalanced power and it also involves bullying. Therefore, the theme 'power play' was derived because of the unbalanced nature of their ranks rather than their gender. The sub-theme interpersonal bullying was derived under power play because the literature states that when there is an unbalanced power where one is publicly humiliated, criticised and intimidated by using their rank as an overarching advantage then it is deemed to be interpersonal bullying.

Stage 3: Categorisation and Overarching themes

As compared to these statements below:

“I have experienced it myself where in being a woman at the workplace you have all these males around you that think that you know you a woman so you don't know any better than they do.”

“I won't say they sexist comments but it's more of your knowledge and your experience in the engineering field.”

One can see that this is also a form of power play, however it is power play that involves gender. This was thus under the sub-theme rankism but under the category ‘gender’. There is a slight difference within this theme ‘power play’, but the researcher had to distinguish what the participants were describing in relation to the research objectives and conceptual framework that was developed by the researcher who used the literature to form the framework. From the above statements’ males were using their gender as a way to overpower women within their organisation especially by undermining their knowledge just because they are female.

When stage one to three were completed, main themes were categorised by the most frequent responses under each objective as follows: objective 1 included power play, subtle discrimination, gossip and being undermined; objective 2 comprised of the changes in emotional state, overall behaviour, and work performance of the participants; objective 2 comprised of the known current recommendations within the organisation to reduce or counteract micro-inequities as well as the participants’ recommended strategies and interventions to reduce the effects of micro-inequities. When the main themes, sub-themes and categories were derived as shown in figure 3.2, the researcher proceeded with stage 4.

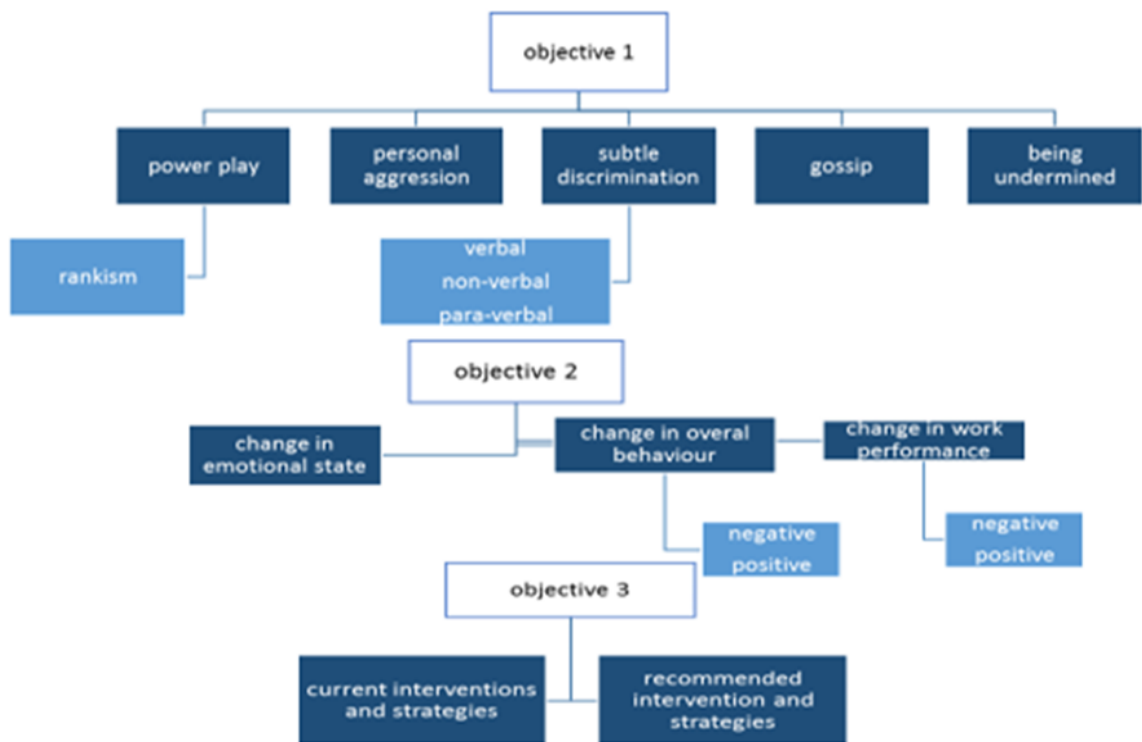


Figure 3.2: Map showing emerging codes, themes and sub-themes using thematic content analysis

Stage 4: Compilation

In relation to the example, the researcher developed the theme Power play, and its sub-themes. The sub-themes had its own categories which were developed in the categorisation stage due to the overarching nature of the sub-themes. The writing process began, and the researcher had to engage with the data and literature in order to find hidden meanings from the text and analyse accordingly as well as to see if the literature and data collection corresponded. This was done in order to make qualitative inferences based on what this study aimed to achieve which will be expanded on in chapter four of this study.

3.12. TRUSTWORTHINESS

The aspects of reliability and validity in qualitative studies are concerned with the creditability and trustworthiness of the research (Hair, et al., 2013). Reliability refers to the consistency of the research where it can replicate the process and results as compared to other studies (Leung, 2015). Reliability also relates to bias in the interview process from the influence of the interviewer's tone in voice and non-verbal behaviours on interviewees' responses; and influence from the interviewees side as they may want to portray themselves in a 'socially desirable' role (Saunders, et al., 2016). Validity on the other hand, is the appropriateness of the tools, processes and data within the study (Leung, 2015).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there are four dimensions in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies. These dimensions are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.12.1. Credibility

This criterion is used for evaluating the true value of a qualitative study in relation to internal validity of a study (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). The researcher obtained credibility through substantial description of the interpretation process and using verbatim quotations from the data gathered to illustrate and support the interpretations within the process. The results were recognisable to the employees who share their experience of micro-inequities.

The data collected was internally valid as transcripts were thoroughly scanned through to ensure it was free from errors and it was guaranteed that no distortion in meaning during transcription occurred; furthermore, the researcher verified the accuracy of the results by sending copies of the transcripts to the participants to ensure that they were the true reflection of what occurred in the interview.

Credibility was maintained through member checking where transcripts were verified with participants; participants were debriefed to enhance the accuracy of the work; and all transcriptions were presented in a transparent manner even though at times it contradicted the themes of the research.

3.12.2. Transferability

Transferability is used as a criterion to evaluate external validity within a study. According to Hammarberg, et al., (2016), a study achieves transferability when its findings can fit into contexts out of the study; and, when researcher views his or her findings meaningful and applicable in their own experiences. One way to achieve transferability is through thick description. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), thick description is a way of achieving external validity such that a researcher describes all data extensively and sufficiently thus allowing one to evaluate the extent to which conclusions that are drawn are applicable to other times, contexts and people.

The researcher met this criterion as the findings of the study has the ability to fit into other contexts outside of this study. However, in order to assess transferability using the rich data provided in this study, it would be of great value to apply it to other studies on micro-inequities using the same methods but conducted in different environments among different people.

3.12.3. Dependability

Dependability is a criterion assessing reliability. The researcher described in detail how data was collected, how codes were determined with its various themes and sub-themes, and the researcher

stated how and what decisions were made throughout the data collection process. The researcher did this with the purpose of evaluating the accuracy and evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher further attempted to strengthen the dependability of the study by making every consideration to ensure that the location that was chosen for the interviews was safe and maintained the privacy of both the researcher and the participant hence ensuring qualitative reliability.

3.12.4. Conformability

This criterion assesses whether bias is eliminated or not by ensuring that findings are the result of the experiences and opinions of participants rather than the preferences of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Conformability was difficult to achieve as the researcher may have influenced participants' responses as most participants did not know what micro-inequities were; therefore, the researcher had to explain and give appropriate examples in order for participants to relate and reflect if they have experienced micro-inequities within their organisation or not. However, when participants gave their opinions and voiced out their experiences, the researcher ensured that she interpreted the data given using the literature of the study and analysed the data objectively rather than subjectively.

3.13. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics provide guidelines for responsible conduct of research to ensure that the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants are taken into consideration (Saunders, et al., 2016). Ethical considerations are essential in research as it aims to protect both the participant and researcher throughout the process which also helps to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. The consideration of ethical issues was paramount to this study. The ethics taken into consideration was as follows:

3.13.1. Autonomy and respect of dignity

Before the study could proceed, ethical clearance had to be granted by the University's Research Ethics Committee. This study was granted full ethical approval with protocol reference number: HSS/0910/018M (appendix C).

Autonomy and the respect for persons was protected using an informed consent form (appendix A) which shows that participants participated at their own will and was not forced to participate in the study; furthermore, participants were allowed to withdraw from participating in this study at any given point in time if they felt the need to do so.

3.13.2. Nonmaleficence

Nonmaleficence is a principle which states that no harm, whether physical or emotional, should be done to participants (Gallardo, 2012).

To safeguard participants' identity, pseudonym names were attributed to participants throughout data representation, the research findings and data analysis which ensured that participants' identities were unknown, and anonymity was maintained throughout the research process. The use of fake names and identities guaranteed that participants were not easily identifiable within the organisation thus it safeguarded their protection from victimisation and/ or stigmatisation.

The researcher, additionally, ensured that willing participants were interviewed at locations far from their own work space which was deemed comfortable to the participant and the researcher.

The use of a location far from the participants' work area ensured that the participants were not known by other employees from the organisation thus reducing the factors of being victimised by their colleagues.

Furthermore, to ensure that there was no emotional harm on participants, they were informed that if there was a reasonable belief that harm or serious risk is upon themselves or unsuspecting third parties they will be referred to the organisation's employee assistance unit for further help.

Lastly, the confidentiality of all participants was firmly maintained through the restricted access of all transcripts and audio recordings which only remained between the researcher and her supervisor.

3.13.3. Beneficence

According to Gallardo (2012), beneficence is when the outcome of the study is of a positive nature and makes a beneficial contribution to the research community. This ethical principal is concerned about the opportunity to do good for society. This study achieved this principle as the recommendations produced from the findings of this study provided organisational support, strategies and interventions and more insight on the concept of micro-inequities within the chosen study site. These recommendations will benefit the organisation to ensure a more conducive working environment and possibly increase revenues in the long-run.

3.14. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A previous study that was done on micro-inequities within a South African context included five classifications of micro-inequities. This study adopted four out of the five as one of the classifications. The researcher did not include micro messaging as part of the classifications as a preliminary literature review pointed out that micro-messaging has two branches namely micro-inequities (which is concerned with negative verbal or non-verbal behaviours) and micro-

affirmations (which is concerned with positive verbal or non-verbal behaviours) hence micro-messaging was a repetition of the concept itself rather than a distinct classification.

This study developed a conceptual framework which included intervening variables which previous studies did not take into consideration. The researcher found that intervening variables such as emotions, perceptions and attitudes had an influence on how the effects of the different micro-inequities were felt and how they were portrayed in relation to the classifications of micro-inequities.

3.15. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the research methodology of the study and explained how the research would be carried out and conducted. The researcher used a qualitative research approach and adopted an exploratory research design. The research strategy that best suited this study was a case study approach whereby the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews using a cross-sectional time horizon. The researcher then analysed the data using content and thematic analysis from which codes and themes were generated to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions. Reliability and validity were taken into consideration and was maintained by using a pilot study and participants' review. In the following chapter the findings of the study will be presented, analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the methods that were adopted in order to produce what follows in this chapter. This chapter will focus on the presentation, analysis and discussion of the data that was collected from thirteen (13) participants who were chosen using a non-probability convenience sampling technique as shown in chapter 3. The data was analysed and discussed, using thematic content analysis, as shown in chapter 3, figure 3.2, according to the research objectives of this study. The discussion in this chapter is reliant on the literature review presented in chapter two and the framework in chapter one, which will include the following sections: the nature of micro-inequities; the effects of micro-inequities on employees; and the interventions that help reduce the effects of micro-inequities.

All 13 participants confirmed the existence of micro-inequities in the workplace and further gave information based either on their own experiences or witnessed experiences. The confirmation of the existence of micro-inequities in the organisation gave rise to asking participants about the nature and types of micro-inequities they have experienced (personally or witnessed); the effects they incurred when they faced micro-inequities; and finally finding out the existing interventions to manage micro-inequities and their recommended interventions to managing micro-inequities in the organisation.

The most frequent themes were mentioned as well as themes that the researcher believed has qualitative data richness which contributed to the study. Responses were presented verbatim to provide insight into participants' views. The discussion of results synthesised the findings with the existing literature and incorporated the researcher's interpretation of the data and applied to the overall objectives of this study.

4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS

This section presents demographic information of 13 participants who contributed to this study. The data was presented according to occupational levels, gender and race.

Participant number	Occupational level	Gender	Race
1	Semi-Skilled	Female	Indian
2	Semi-skilled	Male	Coloured
3	Skilled	Female	Coloured
4	Middle management	Male	Black
5	Unskilled	Female	Black
6	Skilled	Male	White
7	Middle management	Female	Indian
8	Unskilled	Male	Black
9	Semi-skilled	Female	Black
10	Skilled	Male	Black
11	Middle management	Male	Black
12	Middle management	Female	White
13	Senior management	Male	Black

Table 4.1: A table showing the demographic information of the participants of the study

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of the participants were from the middle management (4), skilled (3) and semi-skilled (3) occupational levels; and the least number of participants came from the unskilled (2) and senior management (1) occupational levels. The gender of the sample size comprised six (6) females and seven (7) males. The sample size of 13 participants included all races due the diversity of the organisation. The majority of the participants were black males. The racial groups included 7 Black, 2 White, 2 Indian, and 2 Coloured. Due to the utilisation of convenience sampling the researcher was unable to get equal proportions with regards to the equal representations of each racial group and gender in relation to occupational levels.

The data indicates that micro-inequities are experienced by anyone irrespective of race, gender or occupational level. The preceding statement coincides with the argument made by Armstrong (2010), which states that micro-inequities have been experienced by everyone in the working environment in one form or another.

The sections that follow were divided according to the research objectives of this study and formed part of the foundation themes for the analysis and discussion process.

4.3. OBJECTIVE 1: THE NATURE OF MICRO-INEQUITIES THAT EXIST IN THE ORGANISATION

The nature of micro-inequities deals with various types and classifications of it that exist within the organisation. Participants gave responses in relation to their personal experiences or witnessed experiences thus the researcher had to interpret given responses in relation to the various classifications of micro-inequities within the organisation. The table below depicts the emerging themes that came about during the semi-structured interviews. The frequency of responses that emerged in the study overlapped with one another as some descriptions made by participants pointed out to other forms of micro-inequities rather than just one hence fell into two or more themes.

Themes	Frequency of emerging themes	Percentage
Power play	11	84.6%
Personal aggression	6	46.1%
Subtle discrimination	5	38.4%
Gossiping	4	30.7%
Being undermined	4	30.7%

Table 4.2: A table showing the emerging themes in relation to the nature of micro-inequities that exist

Table 4.2 above depicts the main classifications of micro-inequities that were found in the organisation. Power play was identified as the most emerging theme with a frequency response of 11 (84.6%). Personal aggression was found to be the second highest emerging theme with a frequency of 6 (46%) whilst subtle discrimination was found to be the third highest emerging theme with a frequency response of 5 (38.4%). The table also shows that gossiping and being undermined were the least emerging classifications of micro-inequities that were found in the organisation, both with a frequency of 4 (30.7%). The themes power play, personal aggression and subtle discrimination have sub-themes which will be shown through diagrams as analysis and discussion take place regarding each theme.

Interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviours, rankism, and deviant behaviour were identified in the literature as the classifications of micro-inequities in the workplace. This study revealed all four classifications of micro-inequities in various forms within this organisation. This preceding section will present the analysis and the discussion of the themes as identified sequentially above in table 4.2 in relation to the first objective of this study: To explore the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation.

4.3.1. Theme 1: **Power Play**

Figure 4.1 below shows that the theme ‘power play’ was used to describe two sub-themes namely Rankism and Interpersonal bullying. The sub-themes were further described within the diagram which comprised people using their authority and gender to overpower other individuals in the organisation; the spreading of rumours; public humiliation; and undermining organisational status. These experiences were described by participants as the types of micro-inequities they faced within the organisation and the theme ‘power play’ was used to describe these experiences as it dealt with the various ways one was seen to be abused in the context of perceived power and hierarchical difference. Power play as a theme had a frequency response of 11.

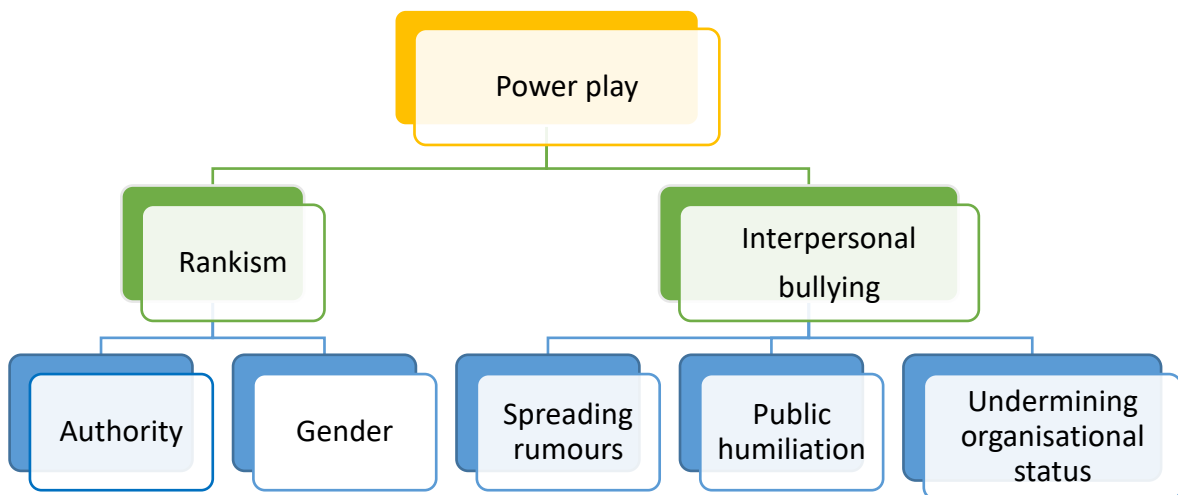


Figure 4.1: Diagram showing sub-themes of ‘Power play’ as the nature of micro-inequities that participants experienced within the organisation.

The sub-themes, rankism and interpersonal bullying, presented below falls under the theme ‘power play’.

4.3.1.1. Sub-theme: Rankism

In relation to the sub-theme ‘rankism’, participants described their experiences in relation to feeling overpowered by individuals of authority or of another gender as compared to their own.

i. Authority

Participant ten said:

“He looks at people like a, like that person that seem like a TV. You use remote control. He talks to people like he is using his remote control.”

Additionally, participant three said:

“So, when people talk to me they either talk down to me or they talk to me like, this is what you need to do! No opinion asked, no nothing. That kind of behaviour. So, that’s what I face.”

From the statements above, it is evident that some participants felt that some individuals who occupied a high rank or level of authority within the organisation exerted a certain amount of power on them and used it to their own advancement. These participants were being told what to do in a controlling manner; moreover, their feelings and humanly nature were not taken into consideration and they felt suppressed to voice out their opinions.

This finding indicates that perpetrators often abuse their positional power and role within the organisation by using it to ill-treat their victims. This positional power was mentioned by Rowe, (2008) as a form of micro-inequity. This form of micro-inequity coincides with Hofstede’s cultural dimension ‘power distance’. Power distance as a dimension explains that less powerful people (skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled levels) accept that they are dominated by more powerful people, who are in senior or middle management level. According to Hofstede (2011) it represents the inequality and unbalanced power between those who have power and who do not have power which is evident in this organisation. However, it is very disheartening to discover that the managers who are supposed to be protecting their employees and leading by example are the actual perpetrators

ii. Gender

Some female participants also expressed their experiences with regards to feeling less powerful than their male counterparts as they felt that males felt more superior and did not support the females within the organisation as much as they should. Participant one stated:

“And you know when it's time to get water and bottles of water it's times when I capture cards. My men in the office, they are supposed to help me.”

The participant stated:

“It's like all the men are for the men!”

Additionally, participant twelve stated:

“I have experienced it myself where in being a woman at the workplace you have all these males around you that think that you know you a woman so you don't know any better than they do.”

“I won't say they sexiest comments but it's more of your knowledge and your experience in the engineering field.”

The participants above pointed out some experiences where females within the organisation feel overpowered by their male colleagues. From their statements, it was evident that they felt as if their male counterparts felt more superior to them based on their masculinity with regards to characteristics, knowledge and expertise. Perhaps the dimension used to theorise positional power can be used to theorise the power distance between males and females such that males feel more superior within the organisation based on inherent characteristics or outer appearance. This finding disagrees with Fuller (2004) as positional power is not the only factor that contributes to failing to treat others with dignity. The perception of superiority based on gender rather than just rank also contributes to treating people with less dignity than they deserve.

4.3.1.2. Sub theme: Interpersonal bullying

Interpersonal bullying as another sub-theme of 'power play' included both personal and witnessed experiences which revealed more micro-inequities in the organisation. These experiences included having rumours being spread, being publicly humiliated, and being undermined with regards to having a lower organisational status in the organisation.

i. Spreading of rumours

Firstly, most participants mentioned that 'rumours' to be the most experienced micro-inequity that they have faced within the organisation. Participant one said:

“It’s not happening to me. Because it’s happening to other women. Sometimes they know. Sometimes they don’t know that if you are friends with a manager then they say that he’s having an affair or they make up stories and they say they went on the top they were doing something.”

From the statement above, it is evident that rumours have been spread about some women in the organisation where other people create malicious stories that they have no evidence of.

Furthermore, participant six stated:

“Yes, I actually had quite a bad patch about 2 years ago at this organisation just cause of one or two people spreading rumours talking behind your back... Treating you like you're nothing.”

Participant six further affirms that they experienced a bad time in their life because of people who were spreading rumours that made them feel worthless. Additionally, respondent thirteen, a senior manager, expressed a concern about how people feel demoralised and uneasy in the workplace because there are people who spread rumours in relation to salaries, and retrenchment, he said:

“I think the employees what they can do is to stop this thing for rumours. Because there's always the other thing that creates this problems among the employees. Is that I'll just come up with a rumour that maybe ey the factory is gona be reducing staff by 300 then you you making everyone now demoralize. You feel like you gona be losing our jobs toward the end of the year.”

From the responses from the three participants above, it is evident that spreading rumours was a problem in the organisation and caused employees to feel demoralised. It would appear that rumours are spread among all levels in the organisation. This can be referred to as co-bullying from an interpersonal bullying point of view (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013). It would seem that, superiors are entertaining co-bullying rather than putting a stop to it. It can be deduced that as more rumours are being spread, the more it demoralises the individuals of the organisation and it could be a major contributing factor to decreased organisational effectiveness which makes it more difficult for the Human Resource department to implement sound and positive organisational behavioural strategies which are helpful and effective.

ii. Public humiliation

Public humiliation, as another micro-inequity, was experienced by participants within the organisation. Public humiliation can be categorised as a form of interpersonal bullying and power play. Participant nine stated:

“But for a supervisor to come when there's everyone around and say that this is what you did wrong, in front of everyone so I believe he could've took me away put my somewhere you know where it will just be the 2 of us cause you will find that people will make reference to whatever the supervisor pointed you your wrong doing.”

Additionally, participant ten shared an experience they had witnessed by empathising with the victim and stated:

“So that they can call the person and tell him that what he did is wrong. Because you cannot, even if I've done something wrong, you cannot shout me in front of other workers.”

From the data presented above from participant nine and ten, it was certain that some people face public humiliation for their wrong doings rather than being confronted privately. It was also evident that this was done by people of higher rankings within the organisation who felt that they can use the power they have to exert such behaviours on people who are below them. This can be confirmed when Einarsen, et al., (2011) maintained that interpersonal bullying reflects an unbalanced power between victims and perpetrators. This finding shows that interpersonal bullying usually occurs

between a person with a higher rank within the organisation and a subordinate; therefore, one can argue with (Pietersien, 2007), when he states that downwards bullying is the most common form of interpersonal bullying regardless of rank within a work context.

iii. Undermining organisational status

Lastly, it was also discovered that some individuals who had lower organisational statuses as compared to their professional counterparts experienced interpersonal bullying within the organisation. Participant five stated:

“Some of them they said sorry. Some of them they just look and say, ‘but I came here to work, so I can’t wait’ and look at me making their eyes look sideways.”

“And if you come early in the morning as the cleaning service, you expect anything. Sometimes you ask someone to not get inside cause it’s wet. So, some of them are getting angry, some of them they don’t want to. They get inside, even you put the wet sign that you are not supposed, they are not supposed to get inside until you remove it. If you are a cleaning service cause you are respect their job.”

The statements above from participant five show how they do not get respect from some employees as a cleaner even though they respect other people’s job titles. The participant expressed how some would apologise for coming into the offices when they had just mopped the floor; however, some would be rude, get angry and say that they cannot wait. The participant further mentioned that being a part of the cleaning staff, they can expect anything, but they individually have respect for others’ jobs.

Participant eight elaborated further:

“You see. It affecting me cause now I, sometimes cause I am, I am doing a oiling. Sometimes I have to fill his machine and then, maybe, he is not there. When he supposed to be with me when I fill it, the oil to his machine, now. Then I must go and look for him. You see, that’s the thing now.”

The statement above shows how participant eight did not feel respected and felt bullied by the person they assist with regards to oiling machines; because the person leaves the work area which now requires participant eight to look for him instead of doing their job at a given time. Participant eight expressed how their job is affected and slowed down because of their colleague.

Data from participant five and eight show forms of interpersonal bullying with regards to being undermined due to their low organisational status within the organisation. According to Cross and

Carbery (2016), employees with lower levels of education experience higher levels of workplace bullying as compared to those with higher levels of education. Furthermore, Ortega, et al., (2009) found that employees with lower skills reported more bullying experiences than did their managers and supervisors, which was evident in the instances mentioned in the findings above. It was also revealed that this trend of bullying was based on the assumption of occupational categories where people with low status jobs with lower levels of decision-making power had a greater risk of workplace bullying as compared to their professional counterparts, like supervisors and managers. The findings of these authors provide evidence and confirms the issues found in this study with regards to being bullied and undermined for occupying a lower organisational status within an organisation.

From the findings of the study, it appears that people who occupy a higher organisational status feel that they have power over people with a lower organisational status as they feel more superior; thus, they do not believe they deserve the same amount of respect as they do because of their low job status as a cleaner or oiler; their low levels of skills; and lower educational levels. This can create great feelings of devaluation and increase the possibilities of a more hostile work environment.

4.3.2. Theme 2: Personal aggression

The theme personal aggression is a form of deviant behaviour in the workplace. Personal aggression was shown to be another emerging micro-inequity that took place in the organisation. Personal aggression as an emerging theme, with a frequency of 6 (46.1%), had personal and witnessed experiences such as employees damaging facilities, coming to work late, not being at the work station when needed, and sexual harassment in the form of sexist comments and actions.

These can be seen in figure 4.2.



Figure 4. 2: Diagram showing the most emerging sub-themes of personal aggression as the nature of micro-inequities that participants experienced within the organisation.

The data that will be presented below fall under the theme 'personal aggression'.

i. Damaging of facilities

Participant eleven gave another perspective of one's familiarities of the type micro-inequities one had experienced in the organisation as one was from a different department, the participant said that:

“He tends to be violent in his approach in things because he feels that the company is being violent towards his safety and his health. So, you would go to him on the work floor he's gonna raise his voice he's gonna show different hand signs.”

Participant eleven also stated:

“And also they tend to look for ways to harm the organization. I'm also in charge of cleaning. When it comes to the bathrooms, people will just leave it as it is because they feel like I don't owe this company anything. Or try might litter because they feel 'I don't owe this company anything I'm just gonna do my work and my work only'.”

He further added:

“my portfolio suffers. In terms of how I see it from my portfolio, if the employees are satisfied or dissatisfied, more litter as I said. With our facilities, damage of facilities not caring for the facilities. The machines are not taken care of.”

Participant eleven, from his experiences, stated that employees look for ways to harm the organisation when they feel that they are being violated. From his first statement, it can be seen that employees who feel that their organisational rights are being violated and see that they cannot get their own way in fact behave in a hostile manner, by raising their voice and showing hand gestures, towards their supervisors or managers. He also emphasised that his portfolio suffers greatly because employees show their unhappiness and dissatisfaction by damaging facilities, and not taking care of the environment by means of littering.

According to Armstrong (2010), everyone within the working environment have experienced micro-inequities in one form or the other; therefore, from the data presented above by participant eleven, it was obvious that managers, who occupied higher rankings of certain departments, also did experience micro-inequities from their employees; this was because certain employees felt that the company is violating their organisational rights thus they exert negative behaviours to people of authority by raising their voices and being hostile. This relates to when Van Kleef (2014) mentioned that usually individuals express their positive or negative state of emotions and behave in a particular manner in relation to how he or she feels based on a positive or negative situation.

Furthermore, this is in line with the Social exchange theory by George Homans (1958) which states that one's perceptions and personal feelings may develop negative attitudes which turn into negative behaviours. The data analysed agrees with Malisetty, (2015) when she explains that employees' personal feelings, desires, discernments and perceptions, qualities and so forth build up some negative demeanours towards the organisation which at that point causes negative conduct and behaviour in the workplace. Employees' emotions serve an intervening variable within this context; hence when employees feel anger or feel violated they behave according to how they feel.

It is evident that the negative behaviours of employees eventually affect all departments within the organisation. This can be supported by Dailey (2012) as he stated that when employees' behaviours are of a negative and poor nature, it has a ripple effect throughout the organisation, people and the organisation's processes. It is alarming to learn that employees' voice out their anger through negative actions, such as not taking care of their environment, instead of communicating with their Human Resource Department about their concerns. Perhaps there is a lack of trust between employees and the Human Resource Department, thus employees feel that the only way their voices can be heard is through behaving in a hostile and destructive manner.

ii. Sexual comments and actions

Participant one recalled a witnessed experience, described the situation and said:

“When she comes in she's friends with all of them she's a very nice person but they also say you know, look at her behind. I will be sitting there and they will be talking about her. And this fellow will say I like your legs. You know it's like so terrible.”

The participant added:

“Men are just very forward. Certain men! That's why I like to dress the way I dress because the moment you wear a dress they say something.”

Participant seven also described a witnessed situation, and said:

“One of our employees went to the tuckshop and the manager want to get another employee into trouble. She was standing with her back towards him and he took a picture of her and she was very upset by that because she thought that her butt and backside of her is showing and she brought it up, but he twisted the whole situation and made her like the bad one. And she was so upset and hurt by that. I feel in certain situations it's so bad.”

The participants above both had similar witnessed experiences regarding males making sexual comments and taking sexual actions towards their female colleagues. Participant one mentioned that

a male colleague had spoken about and to a certain female colleague and commented on her specific female body parts; furthermore, the participant expressed how terrible it was to hear their male colleagues say such things. It was, however, uncertain how their female colleague felt about the situation as the female colleague never spoke about how she felt regarding the situation. On the other hand, participant seven explained how some situations are hard to prove when there is no evidence in place. The participant described how it was said to be that a male employee captured a somewhat sexual photograph of a female employee and the female took action by voicing out her case; however, the male denied it and made it seem as if the female was creating the scenario based on assumption. Even though the female employee voiced out her experience, she still felt hurt, upset and demoralised by the situation because it was difficult to prove the male guilty.

It is apparent, in some situations, some females do not report to their supervisors about such sexual acts that are done by their male colleagues; and even when they do, they are still left feeling demoralised, and unsafe. Some comments and gestures may in fact be unconscious in nature and may be perceived to be sexual by others; thus it may be hard to prove, which Rowe (2008) signifies as a challenge of micro-inequities; however, in the researcher's view, it is important that victims communicate with their perpetrator about how they feel as some male employees are unaware of the emotional outcomes they place on their female colleagues. Furthermore, it can be seen that there was no emotional and organisational support given to females who do feel demoralised when they feel a level of injustice after voicing out their apparent incidents, which is an aspect that needs to be revised within the organisation.

iii. Not at work station and coming late to work

Participant eight significantly stated:

“Like for instant maybe sometimes the person is supposed to be on his own machine is going there by his friend during work time. See, now the managers’ get angry about that, you see.”

they continued to say:

“Yeah. Yes, they come to work late. Maybe they do job go slow. You see. Maybe sometimes he left the machine and go to the toilet and is taking so long. Maybe sitting there by the toilet, like he just don’t care.”

From the data presented above, participant eight described how their colleague was not at their work station when needed and instructed. Instead the colleague uses work time to engage in social activities; therefore, their line managers get unhappy and frustrated. The participant further stated that some employees deliberately, out of the lack of care, work at a slower pace; come to work late; and take longer periods of time in the lavatory. This can be related to the issue of participant eleven

where he mentioned that some employees feel that they do not owe the company their time and energy because they feel that the company does nothing for them.

This behaviour is strongly related to deviant behaviour where employees lack the motivation to conform to rules and policies of an organisation. It was suggested by Malisetty (2015) that employees' personal feelings, desires, discernments and perceptions may build up some negative demeanours towards their work and the organisation which at that point causes negative conduct and behaviour in the workplace and this was certainly evident within this organisation. Individuals are also alienated from their work duties because of their negative feelings and perceptions from past experiences of ill-treatment or injustice; not reaching a common ground with management; and not feeling respected and appreciated within the organisation. Perhaps, employees within the organisation behave negatively while they are at work because of their own personal matters and issues within their households and communities and this is certainly an issue management has to tackle; because, deviant behaviour ultimately threatens the well-being of the organisation (Rogojan & Windersperger, 2009).

4.3.3. Theme 3: Subtle discrimination

The next emerging theme with a frequency of 5 (38.4%) is subtle discrimination. As shown in figure 4.3 below, this theme has three sub-themes, namely verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal behaviours. These sub-themes comprised the nature of the micro-inequity that was being experienced or witnessed such as verbal abuse and jokes; facial expressions and gestures; and tone of voice.

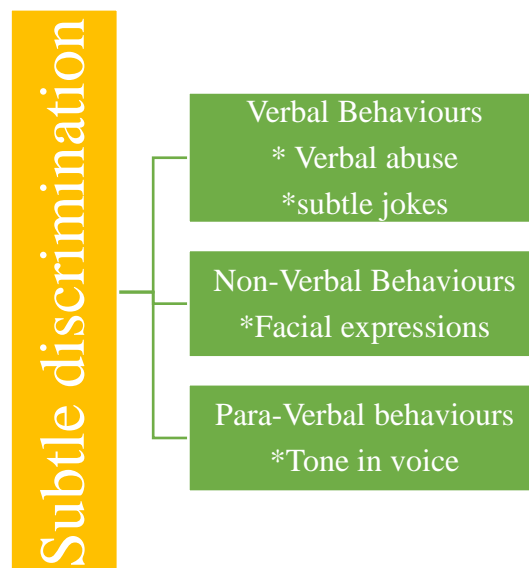


Figure 4.3: Diagram showing the sub-themes of 'Subtle discrimination' as the nature of microinequities that participants experienced within the organisation

The data that will be presented below fall under the theme 'subtle discrimination'. Firstly, verbal behaviours will be analysed and discussed.

4.3.3.1. Sub-theme: Verbal behaviours

With respect to verbal behaviours as a sub-theme of subtle discrimination, participants described their experiences in relation to being verbally abused and subtle jokes.

i. Verbal abuse

Participant one said:

“And I actually heard him saying “oh, there's no body that took the vouchers besides this f* aunty here!”. And I realized that the people in the floor are talking the truth!”***

From the statement above, participant one had been accused of stealing by her colleagues and overheard the accuser conversing with another employee where the accuser verbally attacked her. Even though this statement was not said directly to the participant, she felt hurt and attacked as she is the only female in her department and felt that she should be treated with respect. It seems that behaviours such as swearing by colleagues are very hard to prove especially when it is not done on a one-on-one interaction; nevertheless, it still has negative effects on the victim. It is also apparent either swearing an individual in their presence or not is hard to prevent as it is not highly legislated; moreover, indirect incidents are hard to prove unless there is evidence of the matter. This is in line with O'Brien, et al., (2016) as they mention that subtle discrimination occurs in social interactions which may be indirect in nature but often difficult to prevent because it is not legislated.

ii. Subtle jokes

Another experience of subtle verbal behaviours within the organisation was when employees encountered subtle jokes that caused them to feel demotivated, and worthless. Participant four said:

“And there are people here that some of them they can just tell you straight but it's just that they tell you like you like you are all joking. In a joking manner, but because you got mind you think. Then when he says things of that nature you say that that person is not joking with me but he's referring. And undermining me. He's demotivating me. He's showing me that he is in a better level than me.”

Participant four described that he had encountered a situation where the perpetrator said something meaningful yet hurtful within a social interaction about him but camouflaged their statement in a joking manner so that he would not feel somewhat offended. However, participant four stated that

when he thought about what the perpetrator said and once he processed what the perpetrator actually meant, he gathered that the perpetrator was referring to him, undermining him and made him feel inferior. Jokes such as these are shown in an unintentional manner and form part of everyday interactions (Van Laer & Janssen, 2011); which was evident in this organisation.

It could be that the perpetrator did not realise that the joke had meaning and carried no form of intention; however, the victim felt otherwise. The difficulty of this situation lies in the fact that it is difficult to prove and prevent; furthermore, people's perceptions and interpretations of situations differ which could largely influence the impact that is being felt when the joke is being made. Nevertheless, it was obvious that in this organisation some individuals rely on subtle jokes to convey and express themselves, either about their personal views or own negative feelings, in a manner that does not violate equality expectations. This finding proves that the scholars, in the study done by (Jones, et al., 2017), who argued about how prejudiced individuals rely on subtle discrimination to express bias were correct in doing so; because it is in fact a prevailing situation in most organisations. This can be further related to the literature when Rowe (1990) believed that such subtle behaviours are the projection of one's own negative feelings which one feels about oneself, and these behaviours are used as "a scapegoating process which is supported by myths and by selective perception" towards others.

Secondly, non-verbal behaviours as a sub-theme will be analysed and discussed below.

4.3.3.2. Sub-theme: Non-verbal behaviours

Non-verbal behaviours as a sub-theme of subtle discrimination also emerged within this study where participants described their experiences in relation their colleagues conveying negative facial expressions and gestures.

i. Facial expressions and actions

Participant four said:

“Even like when I'm talking to you, the manager will be looking at him not Even looking at me because it's like I don't speak English.”

Participant four continued to say:

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It can be seen from the statements above that the participant feels that his colleagues, especially within this occupational level or above his occupational level, do not look at him in the same manner as they do with other people. He believes that they do not look at him in the same manner because

he is not very proficient in the English language as he is an IsiZulu speaking individual. He expressed that he tries so hard to voice out his opinions, but he feels like they disregard him because of the language barrier and overlook him to take the opinions of those that they do clearly understand.

It is clear that the interest of his colleagues during work interactions are at a minimum due to the language barrier thus it makes him feel unrecognised and discouraged. This can be supported by Jones, et al., (2016). They state that interpersonal discrimination is measured by how long individuals interact with one another, the number of words used within the conversation and the perceived interest of individuals during their interaction.

It is perhaps that this situation relates to how Rowe, (1990) conceptualised and defined micro-inequities. She defined it as small events which are regularly involuntary and hard-to-prove that are usually overlooked by the perpetrator but is usually felt by the receiver, with regards to this non-verbal act experienced by participant four, it is evident that his colleagues did not notice how they were acting; however, it was certainly felt by the participant. (Young, 2006) believed that micro-inequities do not belong to a certain group, but it happens across all nations and cultures; hence, it is easy to conclude that it occurs when there is a perception of being 'different' which is apparent in this organisation as there is a perception of 'difference with regards to language differences. Additionally, the participant felt disregarded because of the inability to speak the English language well; this affirms Wright's (2013) description of micro-inequities as she characterised it as the ways in which people are singled out, overlooked and marked down in relation to unchangeable characteristics such as race, gender or sexual orientation. Language may in fact also be an unchangeable quality.

Another non-verbal experience which conveyed a sense of rudeness and insensitivity was stated by participant five who said:

“Some of them they just look and say, ‘But I came here to work, So I can’t wait’ and look at me making their eyes look side way.”

Participant five voiced out an experience and explained how they felt disrespected when people would not respect their job as a cleaner. The participant added that when there was a particular employee who was rude and additionally gave them a side-eyed expression to show their disinterest and hostility on them. This side-eyed expression conveyed a sense of disrespect. This confirms that micro-inequities are what people say or do to others which show a sense of disrespect or insensitivity (Sue, 2010). It is highly possible that if such behaviour, regardless of how small it may seem, may create bigger problems such as the feeling of culture exclusion and decreased motivation.

Lastly, the para-verbal sub-theme under the theme 'subtle discrimination' will be analysed and discussed below.

4.3.3.3. Sub-theme: Para-verbal behaviours

Para verbal behaviours relates to changes in tone in one's voice and how one speaks with more enthusiasm to one person compared to another. Participants described their experiences of para-verbal behaviours which fell under the theme subtle discrimination.

i. Tone in voice

Participant eleven stated:

“And it’s that particular employee sort of exuberating hostile behaviour towards the people that are responsible for addressing such issues. So, you would go to him on the work floor he's gonna raise his voice he's gonna show different hand signs.”

Even though the statement above relates more strongly to deviant behaviour as compared to subtle discrimination, the participant also felt strongly about their subordinate raising his voice at him.

Additionally, participant five expressed their experience and said:

“Sometimes you get inside someone is harsh on you, but you have to understand.”

Participant five, as compared to participant eleven, distinctly stated that she has to understand when someone is harsh in their tone of voice or do acts that make her feel sad.

The increase in the tone of voice which conveys a sense of rudeness can be classified under para-verbal behaviours which fall under interpersonal or subtle discrimination. It is evident from participant eleven's encounter that people regardless of their rankings also experience such microinequities which confirms that micro-inequities do not belong to a certain group (Young, 2006). Participant five also experienced the same form of subtle discrimination as participant eleven despite occupying very distinct occupational levels within the organisation. It could be that the participant experienced such behaviours very often that it has become a norm and tries to understand that they need to psychologically adapt and understand other individuals. Jones, et al., (2017) called this developing a 'thicker skin' to situations of subtle discrimination because of the repeated exposure of negative situations thus people become resilient and get used to the negative norms of their organisation and build an understanding and empathetic stance.

However, in the researcher's opinion, individuals who are targets of such subtle act who develop a 'thick skin' as suggested by Jones, et al., (2017), may be affected greatly in terms of health in the long run. Individuals could be prone to increased levels of stress; those who are in fact diagnosed with chronic illnesses such as depression and hypertension would possibly have more difficulty in stabilising their health issues due to psychological damage over time; and may possibly become less effective and efficient in doing their jobs because of subconscious demotivation.

It is apparent that subtle discrimination is another type of micro-inequity that exists in the organisation. The next theme will be discussed in the section below.

4.3.4. Theme 4: Gossip

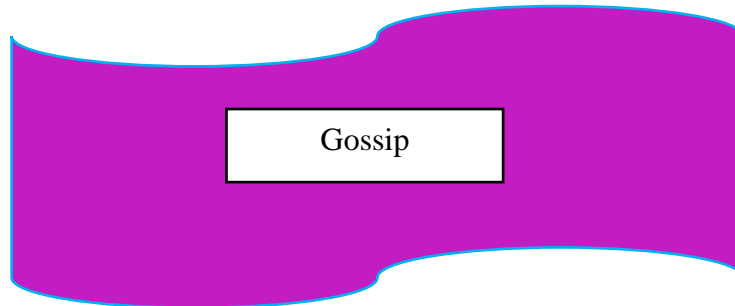


Figure 4.4: Diagram showing theme "Gossip" as the nature of Micro-inequities that participants experienced within the organisation

Gossip emerged as another experience of micro-inequities within the organisation with a frequency of 4 (30.7%). Gossip was described as a nature of micro-inequities and can be classified as a form of deviant behaviour or, in some instances, as toxic behaviour in the workplace. The data that will be presented below fall under the theme 'gossip'.

Participant one said:

"I heard people gossiping and saying I was the one who took the vouchers."

Participant one above stated that they heard people gossiping about them and their situation regarding the accusation of stealing.

Participant two stated a situation and said:

"We had this thing out of work where it had something to do with money basically and instead of it just being a personal matter at home it then got brought into work as in someone was gossiping or whatever and then it happened in work and had to get the managers involved as well."

Participant two above experienced a situation where a personal matter was brought into the working environment by means of gossiping. They stated that once people started gossiping about the issue, managers had to get involved to sort out the issue.

Another participant expressed how situations were experienced where people always found issues with them and how people gossip a lot within their department. Participant six said:

“well in a way where turn around and say you not good enough. Always find problems with anything you do. Gossip a lot behind your back. We got a lot of that especially in our department.”

The above statements from participants one, two and six shows that gossip does take place in their working environment. All three participants expressed how gossip affected their work life and self-esteem. This sort of behaviour from employees in the workplace was an apparent form of a microinequity, specifically relating to the classification toxic behaviour. Gossip can also be known as a form of deviant behaviour which can be shown by a participant’s statement below, who said:

“Maybe they enjoy it when see someone in the bad mood. Is the thing. Cause maybe they experience it from outside and then when see someone he doesn’t help him. So, see instead he gonna go and gossip. For each, no he destroy that person.”

Participant eight above states that when some people do not get the help that they need with regards to their external matters, they tend to gossip which essentially destroys that person. This shows that some people may use gossip in an unconscious way to gain satisfaction and express their anger or hurt.

Out of the four participants who mentioned gossip as a problem, two out of three males reported that they have experienced co-workers gossiping about them. One out of four participants were female. Out of six females within the sample of the study, one female reported issues of gossip; on the other hand, out of seven males within the sample of the study, two males reported issues of gossip. It can be said that more males, within the study, reported incidents of gossip as compared to their female counterparts. This does not agree with findings from Chirasha and Mahapa (2012) as they found that more females report incidents of gossip as compared to males. This is not a certain inference as the sample sizes differed greatly. However, the researcher significantly found that, even though females tend to gossip more (Chirasha & Mahapa, 2012), males also experience gossip as an issue that affects them in some way or the other.

The next emerging theme will now be analysed and discussed below.

4.3.5. Theme 5: Being undermined

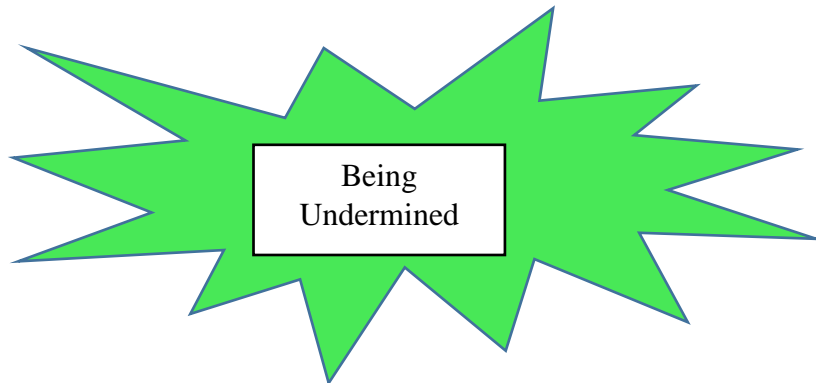


Figure 4.5: Diagram showing the theme "Being Undermined" as the nature of micro-inequities that participants experienced within the organisation

Being undermined emerged as an additional experience of micro-inequities within the organisation with a frequency of 4 (30.7%). Being undermined can be classified as workplace incivility or toxic behaviour in the workplace. The data that will be presented below fall under the theme of 'being undermined'.

Participant one said:

"But sometimes they go beyond, where they think that" she's such a low person, she hasn't been to varsity, and all of that". Like that's how their thinking are. It's like if they tell you something, like something that is high, and you can't understand, it's like they laugh at you! And they always ask like stupid questions, where you won't be able to understand. and they laugh about it. And I hate it I can't stand it."

Participant one commented on worker experience and explained how their colleagues within their department undermine them because they do not have a tertiary education. The participant mentioned how their colleagues interact with them in a very formal way by using words and phrases they cannot understand. Furthermore, they expressed how they cannot stand how their colleagues ridicule and laugh at them for not understanding the jargon they use because it makes the participant feel worthless.

Participant one continued to say:

"And I forgot to say that this person use to also question my abilities saying I worked here so long yet I don't know how to do things."

Participant one continued saying that as workers they had been questioned about their abilities in relation to their tenure within the organisation. Participant six was also undermined within the organisation and had a similar experience as participant one where their abilities were questioned.

Participant six stated:

“Well in a way where they turn around and say you not good enough.”

“Look comments that people pass, it might not seem much, but they affect a person. You turn around and say, you personally know your job and then get turned around and told that you're useless and you don't know what you doing. You basically... It pulls you down.”

The statements above show that some employees' abilities have been undermined. They were told that they are not good enough and this demotivated the employees. It is evident that some people have disregard and disrespect for their co-workers. This upholds Holloway and Kusy's (2010) definition of toxic behaviours.

Notably, participant six mentioned that at times the comments that people pass may seem small, but it does in fact affect a person drastically. This can be linked to the belief that small negative behaviours, when accumulated, can have big negative effects. This noteworthy statement by participant six was in agreement with O'Brien, et al., (2016) as their findings also show that minor issues add up to bigger issues which bring about a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of an individual.

It was also significantly discovered that some people were undermined because they are not proficient in English. Participant eleven explained:

“They sort of disregard it because you can't speak English as well, you can't communicate as well. So as a result, we have a lot of people with a lot of potential but because they are not able to communicate in English very well, they just not given the chance. So, I think that's a major issue where you have that sort of potential but because you judge solely on the fact that you know he can communicate very well and he can't... Then we'll give you the opportunity and we'll pass the next person.”

Participant eleven explained how people with potential are disregarded because they cannot speak English or communicate well. He stated that they are not given a chance because they are being judged on their English proficiency; as a result, they are not given any opportunity to prove themselves and the opportunity is passed onto someone who is believed to communicate better. It is clear that people are being undermined and judged. It is, however, daunting to learn that equal opportunity is not given, and decisions are sometimes based on the level of proficiency of a language one has instead of the level of skill and potential one has. This situation can also be related to participant four, under the theme 'subtle discrimination', where he stated that his opinions have been disregarded because he cannot speak English well. Participant four stated:

“Even like when I'm talking to you, the manager will be looking at him not Even looking at me because it's like I don't speak English.”

“Even if when I'm trying so hard to bring my opinions no one will say "I understand" but I could feel that he doesn't look at me like how he's looking at that other person.”

It is evident that participant eleven's concern was participant four's sad reality. The similarity in these two situations brings confirmation that some people are being undermined and disregarded for being different in relation to their language. There seems to be a perception that if one cannot speak English well, one is assumed to have no potential thus is given no opportunity. Ultimately, this assumption can be upheld when Rowe (1990) stated that micro-inequities occur whenever people are perceived to be 'different'. This could eventually harm the growth of the organisation if not strategically tackled.

The section below will now focus on the next research objective which deals with the effects of micro-inequities on employees within the organisation.

4.4. OBJECTIVE 2: THE EFFECTS MICRO-INEQUITIES HAVE ON EMPLOYEES IN THE ORGANISATION

The effects of micro-inequities on employees is another objective that this study aimed to achieve. Participants gave responses in relation to the micro-inequities they experienced and the effects they felt after their incidents. Their responses ranged according to their emotional state, personal work performance, and their overall behaviour after the incidents based on personal or witnessed matters. Employees within the study showed that micro-inequities do have an impact on their emotional state, their performance and behaviour.

Themes	Frequency of emerging themes	Percentage
Change in Emotional state	10	76.9%
Changes in Overall behaviour	8	61.5%
Changes in work performance	7	53.8%

Table 4.3: A table showing the emerging themes in relation to the effects micro-inequities have on employees

Table 4.3 above shows the themes in relation to how employees are affected by micro-inequities.

The table shows that micro-inequities affect employees' emotional state, their behaviour and work performance. Emotional state was identified as the most frequent effect employees' experiences with a frequency of 10 (76.9%); overall behaviour was the second highest effect micro-inequities had on employees with a frequency of 8 (61.5%); and micro-inequities also influenced employees' work performance with the lowest frequency of 7 (53.8%). The themes identified in the table will now be discussed and analysed sequentially in the sections below according to the research objective: The effects of micro-inequities on employees.

4.4.1. Theme 1: Change in Emotional state

Emotional state as a theme emerged as the most frequent effect employees experienced because of micro-inequities, with a frequency of 10 (76.9%). The emotional state of participants included various emotions and feelings such as low self-esteem, demoralisation, and fear. The emotions and feelings employees felt were considered as sub-themes in the study which were all categorised under the theme emotional state as shown in figure 4.6 below.

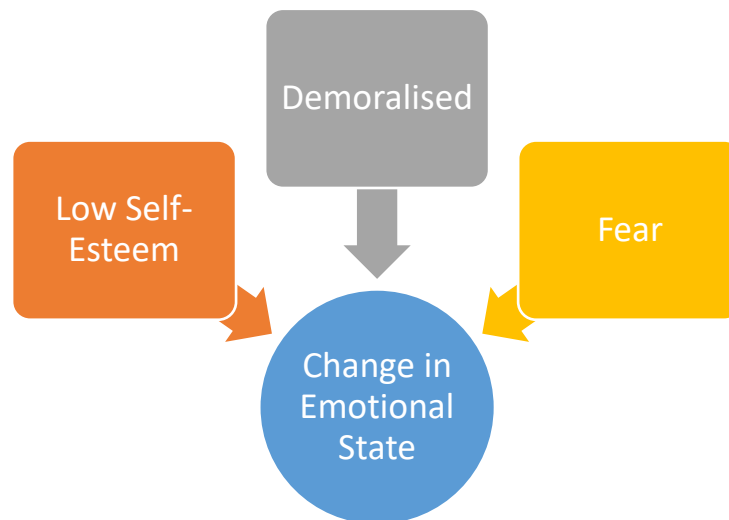


Figure 4.6: Diagram showing the most emerging sub-themes of Emotional state as the effects micro-inequities have on employees within the organisation

The data that will be presented below fall under the theme 'emotional state'.

i. Low self-esteem

Aspects of low self-esteem include questioning one's self-worth and abilities, questioning one's character and being emotionally pulled down. Micro-inequities revealed to have an effect on participants' self-esteem in the organisation. Participant three stated:

“Honestly, it made me feel almost like I wasn't part of either the discussion we were having or for me, it actually made me look at myself and myself worth. You know, ‘am I capable’, you know, ‘what do they take me for’, you know.”

Participant twelve had a similar response to participant three, she said:

“I think the moral of people their ability to want to perform basically it brings that person down and it brings negative connotations to that person and they won't perform as best as they should because they continuously being put down or being spoken down to it sort of breaks down their character.”

The statements above show how micro-inequities affect employees in the workplace. Participant three faced judgement and stereotypical comments because of their race. The participant stated how they felt excluded which eventually made them question their self-worth and capabilities. they began to have a low self-esteem and felt unappreciated in the organisation. Additionally, participant twelve stated how when negative connotations are placed on people, they do not perform well and when they continuously experience toxic or interpersonal negative behaviours it breaks down their character. Rowe (2008) upheld this finding when she states that when employees face continued experiences of micro-inequities, it creates unhappy cycles which range from decreased self-esteem, poor work performance and possibly violence; hence, it can be gathered from the data presented above that when negative behaviours are placed on employees, they feel a sense of lowed self-esteem and exclusion.

Significantly, participant thirteen said:

“For me as someone who's like overseeing this well-being of employees and more like a people's manager it does affect me because sometimes you feel like there is something you not doing right. There is something that you not doing right, you always ask the question that "what do I need to do to change this.”

Participant thirteen stated that when employees within the organisation are not happy they go through the effects of micro-inequities. The participant began to question the abilities of the leaders. Even though they are not directly affected by micro-inequities in the organisation, the effects felt from those who are under their management also indirectly affect them. It is perhaps that the management, at times, do not know what to do to help minimise the effects their employees feel due to micro-inequities because they cannot control such acts. It can be considerably argued that most managers focus more on direct discrimination rather than indirect discrimination thus they do not know the main reasons for the continued unhappy cycles their employees experience.

ii. Demoralised

Another effect micro-inequities place on employees is the feeling of being demoralised.

Participant seven said:

“And then as we go along we see someone comes up with our idea and it's been approved so we wonder now, why is that? And that's where we feel like we feel so demoralized we came up with that idea and it was part of our team effort and we were so enthusiastic about it and it brought our employee morale down because now we initiated, then we were excited, n and there somebody else goes and steals our idea and speaks about it.”

Participant six expressed how they and their team felt demoralised when someone took their idea and took credit for it. The feeling of demoralisation arose because they felt as if they worked hard in creating an idea, yet it was stolen. This relates strongly to toxic behaviour, specifically team sabotage, as stated by Holloway and Kusy, (2010). The literature of this study states that employees on the receiving end of this type of micro-inequity feel demotivated and demoralised which adequately supports the data presented above.

Two more participants expressed how when employees feel demoralised due to micro-inequities it has a major impact on how they perform in their job.

Participant six said:

“actually, got quite upset about it and because of that whole thing it actually demoralized me I actually didn't take pride in my work.”

Additionally, participant ten reasoned and said:

“So, if a person treats you like a nobody, that person will never perform at his or her best because his morale is very down, firstly.”

The participants above stated how one feels demoralised when negative behaviour is experienced. It is perhaps that there is a direct relationship between feeling demoralised, due to micro-inequities, and decreased work performance. It could be that the reason why employees produce lower than their targeted output is actually due to decreased employee morale, hence it is considerably important to give attention to subtle discrimination as done with more overt types of discrimination, which Jones, et al., (2016) affirm in the literature.

iii. Fear

The last prevailing emotional effect that micro-inequities placed on participants was fear. Some participants felt scared to voice out their subtle injustices as they believed it would cause an upset within the organisation and have an effect on their job security. Participant one said:

“I actually heard this and I kept it to myself. I kept quiet for trouble sake. Just to save my job, I don't want to fight in work. And they always make you feel small, and low.”

Participant two had a similar situation as compared to participant one. Participant two stated:

“I was going to take it up but then like I said I had to think about our jobs and where it was going to leave us.”

From the statements above, it can be seen that participants had a sense of fear in them as they thought they would lose their jobs if they reported the matter. They voiced out how they felt within their given situations and further added how they want to save their job and how they will feel after the situation was brought forward.

Participant five distinctly stated:

“Yes, it doesn’t make it feel okay. But you know, it’s my job and the production must be go. So the more the production produced, the more we are getting paid. If the job is not produced, you are not going to getting paid. But you have to think twice, the job is important, and my work is important too. But if this job is not going, I am not gonna getting paid. They, we gonna lose the customers.”

Participant five evidently empathises even though has some fear instilled within her. She makes it known that she does not feel comfortable about her situation but must continue with her job because if she does not continue with it, there will be no source of income and customers will be lost.

Fear was not shown to be an effect within the literature but rather an intervening variable; however, it is evident that it is indeed another emotional impact that is felt by employees when dealing with micro-inequities in the organisation. It is, however, alarming to know that employees feel this way because of micro-inequities and do not report how they feel at a given point. Perhaps this could lead to long term emotional and psychological effects on employees within the organisation.

4.4.2. Theme 2: Changes in Overall behaviour

Overall behaviour appeared to be the second highest emerging theme, with a frequency of 8 (53%), in relation to the effects participants experienced due to micro-inequities. The overall behaviour of participants was either of a negative or positive nature. Overall behaviour included behaviours such as home life changes, not wanting to go to work; reciprocate negative behaviour; withdrawing from people; being resilient; absenteeism increases; and try being positive and self-driven.

Negative and positive behaviours are sub-themes which can be seen in figure 4.7 below.

The data that will be presented below fall under the theme ‘overall behaviour’.

4.4.2.1. Sub-theme: Negative behavioural Effects

With respect to the negative behavioural effects as a sub-theme of Overall behaviour, participants described how their own or their colleagues' behaviour changed when they faced micro-inequities in the organisation.

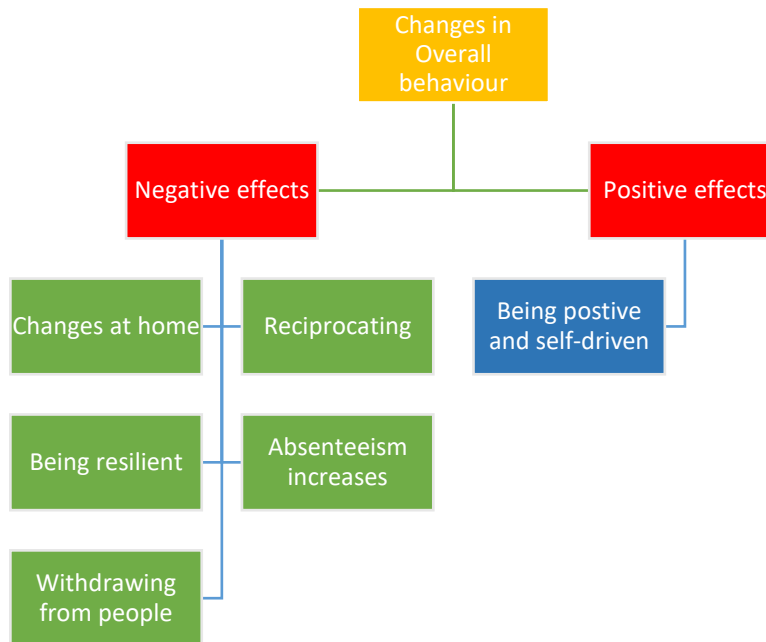


Figure 4.7.: Diagram showing the sub-themes and their components of the theme "overall Behaviour" "as the effects micro-inequities have on employees within the organisation"

i. Changes at home

Micro-inequities influenced participants' behaviour such that there were changes within their homes. Some participants voiced out how they would take out their emotions on their children or spouse. This can be shown when participant one said:

"I wasn't eating. I couldn't eat. When I use to go home, my children I use to take it out on them."

"It only affected home. Because when I use to go home I use to always think, always imagine and think and think and think. And I use actually dream about it."

Participant eleven explained how some employees' behaviour change at home especially males when they experience rankism or interpersonal bullying within the workplace. He notably said:

"I've experienced in my extended family is that typically a person works very very hard at work and he's treated very unfairly cause they feel powerless at

work when they go back home they want to assert that power and want to feel that dominance again.”

“So, I feel like whenever people feel... It might not necessarily be that we treating them in that manner but because they feel that way when they go back home they tend to want to be more violent, more controlling because they want to feel in charge again. So, it does affect not just their performance here at work, but it affects at home.”

From the data presented above, it is evident that not only females feel their behaviour changing at home because of the micro-inequities they face; but males also get affected by the effects of microinequities. Participant eleven explains how males tend to feel the need to show and exert dominance and power over their wife and children because they do not possess the necessary power within their working environment.

The participant explained that these men become violent and controlling their homes because they need to feel in charge. It is apparent from the data presented above that micro-inequities may not only affect the working environment but also changes the behaviours of individuals within their homes and communities. It was not apparent within the literature that individuals' homes get impacted upon due to micro-inequities; however, emotions, such as anger, do play an intervening role in how participants may behave. This is evident when Porath and Pearson (2012) stated that anger is a response to an injustice or a feeling of threat; and when Van Kleef (2014) mentioned that individuals usually behave in a certain manner in relation to how he or she feels. Hence, when individuals feel angry, they behave in a violent manner at home because they cannot not do it within their working environment either due to power play or strict policies.

ii. Reciprocating the same behaviour

Micro-inequities changed behaviours within participants such that when an injustice was exerted upon them, they would reciprocate the same unjust behaviour towards their perpetrators. Some participants explained how they would make their perpetrators feel the way they felt when they felt disregarded or undermined. Participant one stated:

“Sometimes they will talk to you and they try make you a stupid. So, you know what I do? I do the same thing to them. Now I've changed. This place changed me a lot. Now I do the same thing back to them. So, they just keep quiet. I will put them in their places.” Furthermore, participant three stated:

“in the beginning I took offense to it. And honestly my behaviour then would also be the exact same. That kind of triggered that off me. But like I said because it's kind of have been happening for years.”

From the statements above, it is evident that over a period of time some participants would show the same behaviour that their colleagues would show them. Participant one states that when they feel undermined and made to feel inferior by their colleagues, the participant would do the same to their colleagues, so they can feel how the participant felt. Participant one further stated how the situations within the organisation has brought individual change (to be something she is not).

Similarly, participant three stated that in the beginning they would take offence to being judged by some of their colleagues, but they now behave in exactly the same way as them especially because their injustice has been happening for many years within the organisation. Social exchange theory by George Homans (1958) is in consistence with this sort of behaviour which states that one's perceptions and personal feelings may develop negative attitudes which turn into negative behaviours.

It seems like there is a culture of who can survive the worse situations, where if one is not emotionally strong, one will get frustrated especially if one's voice is not heard. There also seems to be a perception that if one takes matters into one's own hands, one's perpetrator will know that their victims are not weak and can stand up for themselves. However, this can bring many other adverse effects not only for employees, but for the organisation too.

iii. Resilience

Victims of micro-inequities within the organisation proved to have a sense of resilience such that they become immune to their subtle injustices and accept it as a norm. Some participants expressed how they are not affected my micro-inequities because they have accepted it to be a norm and are familiar to it. Participant three said:

“like I said, now I just kind of take it as a day-to-day and brush it aside kind of thing.”

Additionally, participant five stated:

“All I can say is that even if especially when you start doing the job it affects you. But the more it continue, you know the job, you know how its working inside here.”

Lastly, participant eleven said:

“to be honest, indifferent actually. I just feel indifferent because I've, and that's just me cause personally I've always had an interest in... It's something I came to terms with a long time ago. when I witness all of these things it's just indifferent because I'm just so use to the fact that it exists. It's something we can't really do much about it in any case.”

From the data presented above, it can be seen that the three participants have built up a sense of resilience in relation to how they have been affected by their micro-inequities. Participant three stated how they now ‘brush’ it off as they have become habituated to their injustices. Additionally, participant five mentioned how micro-inequities affect everyone when starting with a job, however the more the negative behaviours continue and one serves a longer tenure, the more one becomes used to the environment. Participant eleven mentioned that they were knowledgeable about such issues as a result they were not affected and have become indifferent about such discussed subtle injustices. It seems that they have similar effects; however, participant eleven significantly stated that micro-inequities cannot be completely removed as they are bound to happen because people come from different backgrounds and societies which shape their mindset.

It is apparent that some people within the organisation have become immune to the effects of micro-inequities and hence behave as if nothing is wrong. This is in conjunction with Jones, et al., (2017) where they stated that this resilience represents a psychological adaption where people subconsciously adapt and adjust to negative situations by adapting their expectations in line with the ‘new norm’ of negativity and thus people become immune to the stressful experiences they encounter. In other words, people who are repeatedly treated in a negative manner might develop a ‘thicker skin’ over time.

However, (Young, 2014) distinctively states that micro-inequities have long term effects which essentially cause destructive situations, hence the researcher has ‘resilience’ under the sub-theme ‘negative behavioural effects’. This furthermore describes and explains the analogy of a ‘ton of feathers’ by Brennan (2014) as a metaphor of micro-inequities. The researcher is of the opinion that resilience to micro-inequities, as an effect, can occur in people of all ranks and genders and as no significant relation to the level of education one has or the type of economic status they possess.

iv. Absenteeism increases

Absenteeism occurs as a result of not wanting to go to work or when individuals try to hide from their injustices. Participant seven stated:

“You can just see it like, the absenteeism will increase drastically. You know employees will be sick all the time.”

Participant eight said:

“yes, they affect them cause sometimes they never come to work. Maybe sometimes they come late.”

Lastly, participant twelve said:

“I think absenteeism is one of them. Staying away from work to stay away from the problem.”

It can be said that this truant behaviour is an effect of micro-inequities. It is evident from the statements above that the behaviour of participants changed due to micro-inequities such that they would absent themselves to get away from how they truly feel. This is in line with a study done by Cornerstone (2015) as it states that low scores on attendance and dependability are most predictive of toxic behaviour. In the researcher’s view, as much as absenteeism was stated in the literature as an organisational effect of micro-inequities (Upton, 2010), participants could possibly absent themselves to deal with depression, stress, anxiety, and other health related issues. This opinion can be substantiated from the indication made by Hunte, et al., (2013) where they stated that that perceived interpersonal discrimination is significantly associated with depressive symptoms and is strongly related to an individual’s mental health and well-being.

v. Withdrawal from people

The last effect of micro-inequities on employees was withdrawing from people. One participant mentioned that he stated withdrawing from his colleagues when he felt undermined within the organisation. Participant six said:

“My biggest thing was, I did for myself was to pull away. I withdrew from other people I didn't want to talk much. I didn't react well with other people I just kept to myself. Which was the wrong thing to do, now I see it I should have approached the matter in a different way.”

It can be seen from the statement above that the participant began to withdraw from people such that they did not want to interact with others and felt that being alone helped the situation. It is evident that when some employees encounter micro-inequities they believe that the best thing to do is to keep to themselves to avoid interaction and the feelings they experience due to microinequities. Richardson (2017) justifies this finding by stating that this is because victims find it hard to explain to other people as to why such negative behaviours poses a huge problem to them. This, however, could possibly arise from the notion of decreased self-esteem over time which causes the impact of withdrawal behaviour from the work environment which could considerable justify emotion as an intervening variable because the way one feels influences how they behave.

4.4.2.2. Sub-theme: Positive behavioural effects

This study showed that some participants did not get negatively affected by micro-inequities; however, behaved positively in order to stay self-driven and prove their abilities whenever they were undermined or subtly discriminated against. Participant three said:

“I’ve kind of brushed it off. Taken that as in you know what, that’s probably their shortcomings and not mine. So, I try and go on. But I’ll be very, very honest it does still get to you sometimes.”

Although, participant three would reciprocate the same behaviour towards their perpetrators, they also notably behaved in a positive manner such that they would motivate herself and create a positive mind set. The participant, however, stated that although she tries to stay self-motivated, it does still affect her negatively.

Participant four stated:

“To me now it doesn't affect me because I look at the person in the face and say "oh Ok. He's saying that maybe because he want to demoralize me" no I can't give him that happiness. I gave to show him that in stronger than that. So same things happen to those people.”

Similarly, participant six said:

“Cause you must know everyone reacts differently. For me, if some says something negative to me I always want to prove them wrong. I always what to say no no no I'm much better than that I can do way better than that.”

It is apparent from participant four and six, that when they are faced with negative behaviours they turn it into positive energy, such that they channel a positive mindset adopting a positive attitude in order not to show defeat and weakness in front of their perpetrators.

The last emerging theme will be analysed and discussed below.

4.4.3. Theme 3: Changes in work performance

Changes in work performance as a theme emerged as the least frequent effect employees experienced due to micro-inequities, with a frequency of 7 (53.8%). Changes in work performance was either of a negative or positive nature, which formed sub-themes of the theme, as depicted in figure 4.8 below. It includes effects such as the lack of participation and engagement; the lack of focus to complete tasks; decreased effective production; and improvement through positivity.

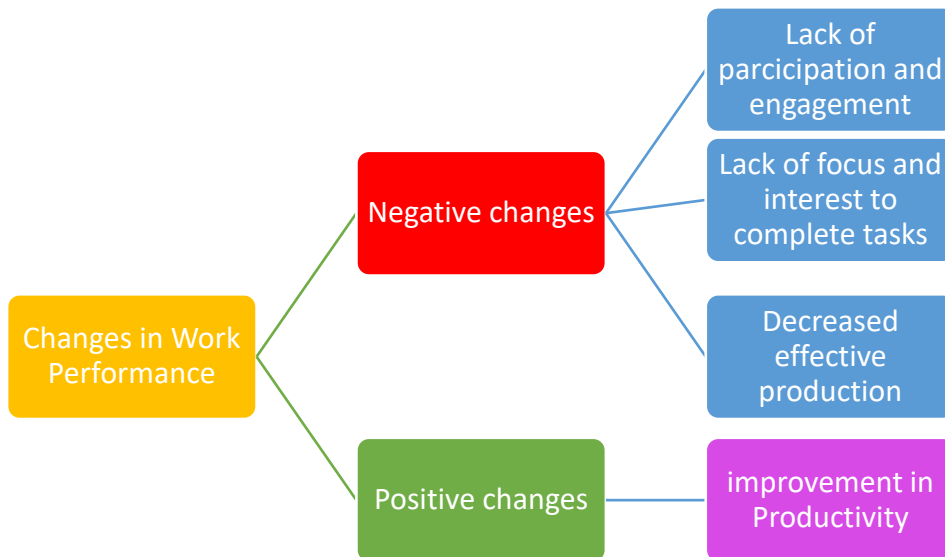


Figure 4.8: Diagram showing the sub-themes and their components of the theme changes in work performance as the effects micro-inequities have on employees within the organisation

The data that will be presented below fall under the theme ‘changes in work performance’.

4.4.3.1. Sub-theme: Negative changes

With respect to negative changes as a sub-theme of changes in work performance, participants described how their work performance decreased when they were faced with micro-inequities in the organisation.

i. Lack of participation and engagement

Micro-inequities influenced participants’ involvement and engagement at work. This is evident when participant four said:

“they decrease in the sense that you when we in the meeting asking for opinions that's where you see when people are in or out. When you asking opinions because when I speak to them I give every one opportunity to say something no matter whether they right or wrong”.

The participant continued to say:

“Because I'm also learn. So, when if they don't participate that's where you see no these people are getting affected they don't participate. But sometimes you give them the simplest tasks that's where you see that they ignoring you. They only want to do the work and they go home.”

From the statement above, it is apparent that employees who are affected by micro-inequities go through a change in how they perform. Participant one expressed how some employees do not participate in meetings, they do not engage in the tasks that are given to them. The participant expressed that employees ignore instructions and are more eager to go home rather than being enthusiastic in their work environment. Participant four further stated:

“it does affect them because you'd see them by they don't care. You put a production here then you will find out that that person does not care anymore. You try to motivate them like you tell them it doesn't happen to you only it happens to every one of us. That's why I brought the spectra that these things are happening. They become part of life so if it affects you that's where I see a person that he's doesn't perform. He comes to work angry, you will find that when you look at that person's face you don't see someone people don't even laugh.”

Participant four further explained how some employees lack interest which contributes to the lack of participation and engagement. It is evident that there is a sense of decreased engagement and participation from victims of micro-inequities. This finding can be found in the literature where (Rowe & Giraldo-Kerr, 2017) also mentioned that micro-inequities have a negative impact on employees' creativity and engagement.

ii. Lack of focus and interest to complete tasks

Participant two described his experience and how it affected him. The participant said:

“It did affect me well work wise I use to come here, and my mind was all messed up thinking about what these people are saying, what's going on, the rumours, stories that have been going around, and it did affect me. I couldn't come here and actually do what I was supposed to be doing. My mind was somewhere else.”

The participant further described how other victims of micro-inequities affected them in relation to work performance and stated:

“Well they not really 100% towards their work. They sort of minds are somewhere else. They don't end up doing anything. They walk everywhere. Perhaps go and sit in the toilet. Smoking.”

It is evident from the statements made by participant four that some employees, including themselves, have lost focus when doing a task, this lack in focus influences how they perform. The participant described that when they were a victim of rumours, they could not focus as they began to over think as the injustice they experienced kept playing on their mind. The participant further described that some employees go to the extent of loitering around, sitting in the lavatory and even smoking. This

is perhaps the psychological effects of micro-inequities such as stress and anxiety influence their ability to focus and perform to the best of their ability which coincides with Rowe's (2008) reasons for the psychological effects employees feel due to micro-inequities.

On the other hand, participant eight said:

“Maybe sometimes he left the machine and go to the toilet and is taking so long. Maybe sitting there by the toilet, like he just don't care.”

Unlike participant two who stated that when they faced their micro-inequity they lost focus in completing their tasks, participant eight expressed how some employees show a lack in focus and interest as a form of expressive behaviour towards their perpetrators. Although they become deviant in their behaviour to express their subtle injustices, the lack of focus they express can be seen to be an effect of micro-inequities on their work performance.

iii. Decreased effective production

The last negative effect that micro-inequities placed on the work performance of participants and their colleagues was decreased effective production. Participants' expressed how output would decrease when employees are unhappy or frustrated by the micro-inequities they faced. Participant three stated:

“You can see their morale changes and obviously they make stupid mistakes. And, because maybe it's either playing in their mind or you know, it's hindering their work performance.”

It can be seen from the statement above that work performance gets affected such that some employees begin to make mistakes because their morale is low due to micro-inequities.

Participant seven said:

“They will pull their work. Whereas they can do 5 pieces, they will only do 2 pieces in 1 hour.”

However, participant ten empathises and says:

“Let's say now if I am coming to work. My machines must produce about 500 a day but if I am down then I won't reach 500. I'll do at least half of that because I am not happy.”

It seems that some employees indirectly show their unhappiness and impacts due to microinequities through the output they produce. The participants above express how employees do not produce the targeted output. They show decreased efforts and are not effective. It is perhaps that the organisation is facing decreased output, not only because of technological reasons, but also because of underlying

problems in relation to their organisational behaviour. This finding can be considerably maintained with the findings from Cornerstone (2015) as they state that toxic employees are significantly more productive than their non-toxic counterparts and they are able to complete tasks quicker as compared to those they negatively influence.

4.4.3.2. Sub-theme: Positive changes

Notably one participant mentioned that when she faced subtle discrimination from her supervisors, it affected her in a positive way such that when she felt publicly humiliated or had been shouted at, she would set herself targets and prove people that she can perform to the best of her ability. She said: *“And I was like I will have to prove them wrong. I Wil have to prove that I can meet, I set myself targets when I was working on the machines. I'd say by this day I Want to do 3 or 4 orders and stuff everyone else then I do the orders then I'll be pleased with myself. I think for what was mostly important was for me to prove myself.”*

In the researcher's opinion, this would be a very good mind set to adopt in order to reduce the effects micro-inequities have on personal work performance. While there is a temptation to wallow in self-pity, the respondent actually engages conduct which attempts to transform the status-quo. This amply demonstrates how one can in some sense become the architect of one's own fortunes or misfortunes.

Lastly, the section that follows will focus on the third research objective which aims to ascertain the organisation's support structures in managing micro-inequities.

4.5. OBJECTIVE 3: THE ORGANISATION'S SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN MANAGING MICRO-INEQUITIES

Determining the organisation's support structures in managing micro-inequities is the last objective that this study aimed to achieve. Participants gave responses in relation to the organisation's current structure and support measures in place in managing micro-inequities; their recommended interventions to the organisation to their Human Resource Department (HRD) which were regarded as themes of this objective.

4.5.1. Theme 1: Current interventions and strategies in managing micro-inequities

Figure 4.9 below shows a bar graph of the number of responses participants gave in relation to the current interventions, support measures and strategies the organisation has in order to manage micro-inequities. Out of thirteen participants, seven (54%) said that there are measures in place; whilst, six

(46%) said there are none. Out of the seven participants who said yes, 3 stated the processes that are in place are not effective as complaints still arise and employees still feel the way they do once they encounter micro-inequities.

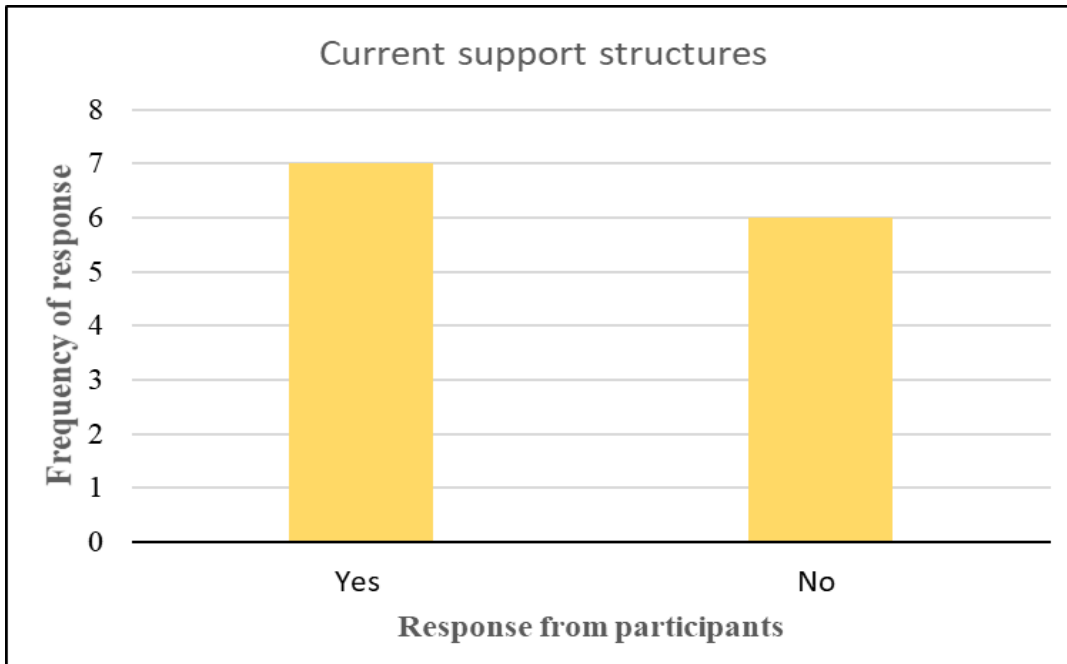


Figure 4.9: Bar graph showing the frequency response (yes/no) of current support measures used to deal with micro-inequities

Participant ten stated that employees go to their HRD for help, however it is not effective. This is evident when he said:

“I don’t think so. Because most of them they come back and complain that the HR is doing nothing.”

Participant twelve said:

“well we have an hr department where you can go through the grievance procedure you know and voice your dissatisfaction to whatever is bothering you or whatever is causing you discomfort or contributes into bad behaviour in the organization. We have a clinic sister, who she can recommend professional help, Medical help, counselling, whether you have an addiction problem or an alcohol problem. So I think the company pretty much covers.”

However, she stated that the effectiveness of the support measures was dependent on the employees and their willingness to change their negative behaviours.

Six out of thirteen participants stated that there are no support measures and interventions for micro-inequities within the organisation. Participant three said:

“Honestly, from my experience I’d say none because I haven’t had that support. I’d say none from my experience.”

Additionally, participant seven stated:

“They can always speak to HR. But there's nothing in place at the moment for micro inequities.”

It is evident from all the statements above that some believe there are support measures in place whilst some believe that there are none. It is perhaps that there is a lack of communication and a lack of understanding about the processes in place to assist people with their subtle injustices, as participant nine states:

“none that I know off. And if they are then then we are not aware them.”

This finding is in consistence with Upton (2010) where it was noted in her findings that victims of bullying report to receive less social support from the Human Resources department in an organisation and are often pushed from person to person. With this being said, the researcher is of the opinion that management needs to be clearer and educate employees about the support measures that are in place where their voices can be heard. However, it could be that some employees, who have knowledge about the support structures in place, do not want to use their support channels as they feel that they will be victimised and further targeted. The fact that some employees are unaware of the processes in place is a great concern.

The next theme that will be analysed and discussed in relation to support measures within organisation is the proposed interventions and strategies from employees.

4.5.2. Theme 2: Recommended interventions and strategies in managing micro-inequities

Sub-theme	Frequency of emerging subtheme	Percentage
Training and workshops	9	69.2%
Awareness and research	6	46.1%
Micro-affirmations	5	38.4%
Counsellors	4	30.7%
Team building	3	23.0%

Table 4.4: Table showing the sub-themes and its response frequency of participants’ recommended interventions and strategies

Table 4.4 above shows the recommended interventions and strategies participants proposed in order to manage and deal with micro-inequities within the organisation. The most notable emerging sub-theme was training and workshops with a frequency of 9 (69.2%). The second highest emerging sub-themes were awareness and research, and micro-affirmations, with the frequencies of 6 (46.1%) and 5 (38.4%), respectively. The least emerging sub-themes were counsellors and team building, with a frequency of 4 (30.7%) and 3 (23.0%) respectively. The subthemes presented in the table will now be analysed and discussed sequentially.

i. Training and workshops

Training and workshops were suggested to be the most recommended solution in managing microinequities. Most participants expressed how these help in educating and teaching people about organisational behaviour, the concept of micro-inequities, and how to treat people within the workplace. Participant eight said:

“Like, they not just call us. they supposed to call us maybe every, maybe once a month. To teach us how to behave. You see there’s something like, something like, that gonna bring us together. To teach us how you behave to workshop us. They must, they must bring us together. Maybe like, maybe once a month. To teach us how you behave in the workplace. How you treat one another in a workplace. That’s what I’m thinking. cause they are not doing that.”

Participant eight above expressed how the HRD should conduct workshops to educate employees about work conduct, ethical conduct and organisational behaviour.

Another participant’s suggestion, to the HRD, was informed by the fact that the males within the organisation undermine women and show disrespect towards them. Participant one said:

“it’s nice if they get people from the outside to talk about behaviour and talk about how not to abuse women.” She later continued to say: “they should bring in someone from the outside just to talk to the males and how to carry on with females in the working environment.”

It is evident from the statements by participant one that training, and workshops need to be held, where topics of sexual harassment and ill-treatment towards women need to be discussed as these acts have a huge impact on employees, particularly the female employees.

On the other hand, training and workshops was not only recommended for employees on lower occupational level but for higher ranked occupational levels too. It was alarming to note that people who occupy management and supervisory positions needed interpersonal communicative training as

some participants stated that people who occupy those positions commit interpersonal discrimination and unaware of the negative effects it brings upon employees who are under them.

Participant three said:

“maybe for supervisors’ or managers to go for training. And when I say training, I mean people training. That’s just you know. And then maybe they’ll be able to understand that, you know, there are certain ways to speak to people. That there are certain actions that affect people. That there are things you shouldn’t do and that there are things that you should do.”

The two participants below also suggested that the leaders of the organisation need people management training as most of the people who occupy such high positions are qualified and experienced with regards to their job descriptions but do not know how to manage people and communicate well with them. This is evident when participant eleven said:

“managers and supervisors have to be well equipped leaders. So that they can receive that training in knowing how to handle, how to deal with problems and how to lead people. Cause at the moment, we have managers that are very good at output, but the problem is that in terms of sustainability and making people comfortable ensuring that people are motivated, ensuring that they address issues of inequalities it’s a bit lacking then.”

Similarly, participant thirteen said:

“The challenge is you find that maybe we've got a lot of specialists, you might find that we've got technical person, an engineer, running a production line and he that person does not have the knowledge of dealing with people he's more of an engineer. The solution maybe is to, is for us focus more on training these people-management skills to our supervisors and managers.”

It is apparent that people are being given management positions based on their technical expertise and knowledge and those who hire them are only focused on production rather than also focusing on the people they have to manage. This suggestion stems out from the incidents of feeling illtreated, not being communicated to in a proper manner, and the perception of using authority to overpower an individual. Training and workshops can serve as a good start in managing microinequities within the organisation which can be supported by D’Cruz and Noronha (2013) within the literature. Furthermore, this suggestion can be affirmed by Rowe (2008) as she noted that it a way to make people aware of their behaviours and to make better decisions in how one treats another person.

ii. Awareness and research

The second highest recommendation in managing micro-inequities was awareness and research. Participants expressed how they need to be educated and made aware of the concept of microinequities as it does greatly impact upon them and the organisation. Participant two said:

“All this that we've been talking about now. They need to make the people sort of aware about what's really happening and what can they do. Cause I'm pretty sure that half the people don't even know what's it Called. Educate them.”

Similarly, participant nine said:

“make people aware. They should be aware of what micro-inequities are and how they can avoid them if possible and the effects that it might have how they affect employees.”

“I think research has to be done. We need to do our own research as an organization as well.”

It was apparent within the organisation that participants did not know what micro-inequities were; and they did not know that the subtle negative behaviours they faced were in fact called microinequities. Therefore, the recommendation of awareness would serve has a solid foundation in managing micro-inequities. It is essential that research needs to be done by people of all ranks, races and gender to know the concept of micro-inequities, its apparent existence within the organisation, and the many damaging effects it brings forth.

iii. Micro-affirmations

Participant three said:

“I think people honestly need to treat people with respect. If you want to be respected, you need to treat someone else with respect. And I honestly think if you just do that, that will just automatically just start.”

Participant six explains:

“the only way that we gona be able to do it is basically be nicer to each other...”

Additionally, participant twelve stated:

“I think just tryna be better people you know what do they say, " treat others like you would like to be treated" You know. So, have that common courtesy

and professionalism, have manners towards someone, have respect towards that person. To earn respect, you gotta gain respect.”

The data presented above can be summed up as micro-affirmations. Rowe (2008) stated that the concept of micro-affirmations lies in the practice of generosity, providing comfort and support, and respect which is evident from the recommendations above. The participants recommended that people need to respect each other and be nicer to one another. This, essentially, creates harmony in the workplace by strengthening relationships (Rowe, 1993). Young (2014) states that when micro-affirmations are practised, it passes from one person to another over time thus creating a conducive working environment.

iv. Counsellors

Participants suggested the need to have a counsellor within the organisation who will work together with the HRD to provide support, advice and motivation when employees face microinequities. Participant six said:

“I'd actually say look for not only for that use but other uses like people having a loss in the family we need to see if we can't get somebody that can like a counsellor.”

Additionally, participant five said:

“It's only a counsellor who can. Like iHR could be with a counsellor. Someone who next to him. Not all the time but who can advise.”

From the statements above, it can be seen that some employees are unaware there is a clinic sister on site who offers support which be a great concern for the HRD. However, it could also be that employees have given this suggestion because the clinic sister is more involved with injuries that occur on site. Having a professional counsellor or psychologist serves as a good support structure where people voice out their feelings and can get the emotional support they need which was suggested by Rowe & Giraldo-Kerr (2017) because they state that counselling and coaching helps validate and understand the feelings of victims and essentially one-on-one sessions provide confidentiality and a chance to develop a plan of action to remedy the damage caused.

v. Team building

Participants recommended there should be team building activities in order for employees to get to know one another as some participants experienced judgemental remarks. Participant three stated:

“I think definitely more kind of team building, kind of things. also, maybe we also need to have kind of events or things where people can be interactive. Not

in a work environment but outside of work so that people can actually see that there is a difference between the work environment and the way you are outside. And then maybe there'll be able to look at people differently and especially races differently."

Additionally, participant twelve stated:

"I think there needs to be more togetherness with departments and within certain between people. Sort of team building that also could improve relationships where you can see the person outside the workplace you know because a lot of people are under pressure."

Both participants above expressed how people need to get to know one another as people act differently at work as compared to a more relaxed setting such as interactive events or in their homes. Rowe (1993) suggests the concept of networking with affected minorities to create an effective system because it provides skills training and contacts which enhances mentoring, provides personal support and creates a 'family' orientated bond. However, in this study, team building was suggested to build a sense of togetherness and understanding of peoples' lives rather than the concept of networking.

4.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to present, analyse and discuss the data that was collected from 13 participants with the aim of achieving the three research objectives of this study. Data was presented by using the actual words of participants; tables that illustrated the emerging themes of the study with their respective frequencies; and by using diagrams and graphs. Data was analysed accordingly then discussed which was later on linked to the literature of the study to provide justifications, evidence and possible arguments. The objectives were seen to be satisfactorily achieved. The next chapter focuses on concluding the study as well as providing recommendations and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter four unpack the data that was found in this study, it was further analysed and discussed accordingly using content-thematic analysis. This chapter will now conclude this study by providing the reader with a summary of the findings according to the themes that were created and the research objectives. Furthermore, this chapter will unpack the managerial implications and recommendations regarding the methodology adopted, the literature that was reviewed, and the practical recommendations of this study as well as recommendations for future research that will be conducted on this topic.

5.2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature and effects of micro-inequities within the workplace, specifically within a South African organisation. this section will summarise the aspects and findings that arose within the study. The summaries of this section have been divided according to the demographic information and the main themes that were discovered in this study under the research objectives.

5.2.1. Demographic profile

Based on the demographic representation of participants indicated in chapter 4, the data indicated that micro-inequities are experienced by anyone irrespective of race, gender or occupational level. The majority of the participants were middle management. There were more males than females in this study and the majority of the participants were African. Micro-inequities were found to affect everyone regardless of their demographic profile in or out of the organisation.

5.2.2. Classifications and nature of micro-inequities

It was found that there were various forms of micro-inequities that the employees experienced within the organisation. The classifications that were found were consistent with the classifications that were identified in the literature.

i. Power play

The most emerging classification was 'power play'. Power play comprised of two sub-themes. It was evident that the use of positional power and the power of being more superior because of gender was a major issue within the organisation. It was found that the perception of superiority based on gender rather than just rank also contributes to treating people with less dignity than they deserve.

This study discovered that superiors were entertaining co-bullying rather than putting a stop to it; furthermore, organisational effectiveness from employees decreased as more rumours were being spread, which was a form of interpersonal bullying. Additionally, people of a higher rank would publicly humiliate their employees instead of taking them aside and confront them about their wrong doings. It was also found that people who occupied lower ranks such as the cleaners were disrespected and were undermined because of their low educational levels.

ii. Personal aggression

Personal aggression was the second form of micro-inequity found within the organisation. It was found that employees showed personal aggression through damaging the organisation's facilities; not being at one's work station when required and coming late to work; and, conveying sexual comments and sexual actions on other employees.

Employees were seen to behave in a hostile manner by raising their voice and showing hand gestures towards their supervisors thus it was concluded that supervisors and managers also experience micro-inequities. Employees personal aggressed towards their organisation when they felt violated and devalued instead of communicating it to the Human resource department. It was also found that females within the organisation do not complain about sexual comments and actions that they experience from their male counterparts because it was hard to prove their injustices. Furthermore, the males who showed these negative behaviours were not aware of how they made the females feel because the females would not confront them about it. When females did complain, it was overlooked by management because their injustice could not be proved thus it was evident that there was no support given to these females were further investigation was needed.

It was also found that employees personally aggress towards the organisation by not being at their work stations or coming late to work due to their own personal matters within their households and communities.

iii. Subtle discrimination

The third micro-inequity that existed in the organisation was subtle discrimination. Subtle discrimination was evident through non-verbal, verbal and para-verbal behaviours that employees either witnessed or personally experienced. It was seen that employees who experienced swearing

by other colleagues were hard to prove especially when it is not done in a one-on-one interaction. It was also found that indirect or direct swearing was hard to prevent as it is not highly legislated within the organisation's policies.

Employees experienced subtle jokes. Most of the subtle jokes that were experienced were the reflection of the perpetrator's own personal negative feelings. Furthermore, people's perceptions and interpretations of situations differ which could largely influence the impact that is being felt when the joke is being made.

Some individuals felt that they were unrecognised and felt discouraged because of their unchangeable characteristics such as not being proficient with the English language. It was seen that regardless of how small a behaviour may seem, such as side-eyed gestures, it creates the feeling of culture exclusion and decreased motivation.

Additionally, some participants experienced para-verbal behaviours often however they have gotten used to it. Even though they have concluded this behaviour as a norm of their working life, it was found that in the long-run these employees' psychological health can be affected such that they may become less effective in the organisation.

iv. Gossip

Gossip was found to be another micro-inequity that existed in the organisation. It was found that males actually experienced this micro-inequity more than females; and even though females experience gossip more according to the literature, males also experience gossip as a huge issue that affects them in some way or the other.

v. Being undermined

Being undermined was the last form of micro-inequities that appeared in the organisation. It was found that minor issues add up to bigger issues which bring about a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of an individual. Employees were being undermined and disregarded for being different in relation to their language. There seemed to be a perception that if one cannot speak English well, then one is assumed to have no potential and is thus not given an opportunity to voice oneself in organisational meetings.

5.2.3. The effects of micro-inequities

This study found that there were various effects that employees experienced when they were faced with micro-inequities. However, some of the effects were also positive rather than it only being negative. These effects included changes in employees' emotional state, overall behaviour within the organisation and changes in their work performance.

i. Changes in emotional state

The effect that appeared the most in this study were changes in the emotional state of employees. Employees experienced low self-esteem such that they felt excluded which eventually made them question their self-worth and capabilities. It was evident that management, at times, do not know how to help minimise this effect because they cannot control the acts of others. It was found that managers seem to focus more on direct discrimination as they perceive it affects employees more rather than focusing on indirect discrimination.

Employees also felt demoralised within the organisation once they were victims to micro-inequities. Furthermore, employees felt fear because they were concerned that they would lose their jobs if they complained about their injustices. This was not an apparent effect in the literature, however this study showed that fear is also an effect that is felt by employees who experience micro-inequities.

ii. Changes in behaviour

The changes in overall behaviour were found to be either positive or negative in nature with regards to the impact employees felt due to micro-inequities. It was found that employees who experienced micro-inequities, especially males, faced changes at home such that they would become violent and overpowering because they felt the need to be in charge because they are being undermined or overpowered at work. The literature, in this study, did not reveal changes at home to be an effect; however, it was apparent in this study that emotions, such as anger, do play an intervening role in how employees behave at home or at their workplace.

It was also found that employees would reciprocate the same behaviours of their perpetrators. There seemed to be a perception among participants that if one takes matters into their own hands, then one's perpetrator will know that they are not weak and can stand up for themselves. This study also found that some employees develop a notion of resilience and become immune to their injustices, meaning they psychologically adapt to the micro-inequities they experience. Furthermore, absenteeism within the organisation increased due to micro-inequities. Employees who were faced with micro-inequities changed their behaviour such that they would absent themselves to get away from how they truly feel. They would say that they are sick; however, there were no physical symptoms. It was evident that employees changed their behaviour according to how depressed they felt. Lastly, employees withdrew themselves from other people within the organisation.

One of the positive behavioural change that was found in this study was that some employees became more self-motivated to prove their perpetrators wrong.

iii. Change in work performance

Another effect that emerged within this study was changes in work performance. Most of the changes were negative in nature however there were some positive changes in work performance despite being victims of micro-inequities. It was found that there was a lack of participation and lack of engagement in work activities. Furthermore, it was apparent that there was a lack of focus and interest to complete work tasks according to employees' job descriptions. Employees' production was affected such that there was a decrease in effective production. It seems as though employees indirectly show their unhappiness and impacts due to micro-inequities through the output they produce. Some managers stated that the organisation has been experiencing low output rates because of technological issues however this study shows that employees produce below their targeted output because they are unhappy about their subtle injustices.

Lastly, some employees changed their work performs in a positive manner such that instead of wallowing in self-pity they engage in conduct which attempted to transform the organisation and prove their victims wrong.

5.2.4. Support structures

This study showed there were support structures in place to help reduce micro-inequities; however, there were also employees who stated that there are none in place. It was found that some employees do not know about the structures that are in place within their organisation; whilst, some employees who know about the structures, do not want to use these support structures because they feel they will be victimised or further targeted.

i. Recommended interventions and strategies

This study found that employees suggested that the organisation have more training and workshop sessions to teach and inform employees about micro-inequities, its types and its effects. It was evident within this study that most of the participants did not know that what they were going through is actually known as 'micro-inequities'. Additionally, awareness and research were discovered to be a strategy such that when employees are aware of what is deemed to be a micro-inequity and how to handle its impact, it will be taken seriously, and policies can be implemented accordingly.

Employees also suggested that people need to be kind to others, in the literature this was defined as micro-affirmations. Furthermore, it was found that employees were unaware that they had a clinic sister within the organisation as most of them suggested having a counsellor as an intervention and strategy. However, it was also found that the clinic sister is more involved with injuries that occur in the organisation; therefore, it was apparent that the organisation needed a professional counsellor to attend to the psychological needs of employees.

Lastly, team building was suggested because it brings people together and helps in learning about others within the organisation. This was found to be an intervention to bring social cohesion in the workplace as well as promote an environment of togetherness

The next section will layout the relevant outcomes of the study according to the research objectives.

5.3. OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

The section below shows the outcomes of the study according to the research objectives. It highlights the concepts that were found under each objective and also highlights the researcher's conclusion with regards the shortfalls that was discovered and her personal recommendations for the organisation under each objective.

5.3.1. OBJECTIVE 1: THE NATURE OF MICRO-INEQUITIES THAT EXIST IN THE ORGANISATION

It was found that the experiences of participants are notably related to the types of micro-inequities presented in chapter 2 of the study, classified as interpersonal discrimination, toxic behaviour, rankism and deviant behaviour. The feedback provided in the findings with regard to the nature of micro-inequities, which was based on personal experiences and witnessed experiences, included power play, personal aggression, subtle discrimination, gossiping and being undermined. Power play which was the most emerging micro-inequity, included rankism by authority and gender; and interpersonal bullying through spreading rumours, public humiliation and undermining organisational status. Personal aggression took place in the form of damage to facilities, sexual comments and actions, and not being at the work station or coming late to work. Subtle discrimination was apparent through negative verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal behaviours. And lastly, gossip and being undermined were the least emerging micro-inequities that were found. It was sad to know that equal opportunity is not given because of language proficiency. It seemed that there is a great lack of trust between employees and the HRD, as well as the lack of emotional support to women who feel victimised by their male counterparts.

5.3.2. OBJECTIVE 2: THE EFFECTS MICRO-INEQUITIES HAVE ON EMPLOYEES IN THE ORGANISATION

It was intriguing to learn about the effects micro-inequities place on employees which came in the form of emotional, behavioural and work performance effects. Participants' emotional states included low self-esteem, demoralisation and fear. It is, however, alarming to know that employees

feel fear because of micro-inequities and do not report how they feel at a given point. Employees' behaviour was also affected, such that there were changes in their homes; they would reciprocate the same negative behaviours that they experienced; adapted and became resilient; absented themselves from work; and withdrew from the working environment. It was disheartening to note that most employees would elicit such behaviours rather than voicing it out or positively confronting the problem.

5.3.3. OBJECTIVE 3: THE ORGANISATION'S SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN MANAGING MICRO-INEQUITIES

Although 54% of the participants gave a positive response with regard to existing support measures and interventions to address micro-inequities, it remains a concern that 46% of the participants were not aware of these support measures and interventions; and three participants out of the 54% stated that the existing measures were to some extent ineffective. Perhaps learning of the support measures and interventions can contribute to the transformation of the current condition of microinequities in the organisation if every employee was to be conscious of it.

5.4. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managers, of this organisation, especially the Human Resource Department have the responsibility to see to this issue and the impact it has on the organisation and its employees. From the findings of this study, it is evident that micro-inequities are a serious issue which could largely impact its employees which later on negatively impacts the organisation. Managers may have to re-align their policies and strategies to be more employee-orientated where employees' well-being are taken into thorough consideration.

The major implication for managers in setting aside a budget for the re-alignment of their training techniques to promote social cohesion and create awareness of organisational behaviour in relation to diversity. The budget also has to be taken into consideration in order to implement strategies and support structures to help reduce micro-inequities in the workplace such as team building sessions, getting a professional counsellor and having training sessions regularly. Even though it is difficult changing employees' behaviour, perceptions, attitude and emotions, it is possible to educate and mentor employees in order to gradually transform their mindset and create a positive work environment for all.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section shows the recommendations to the organisation where the study was conducted and for future research on the topic of micro-inequities. This section will also show the recommendations with regards to literature and methodology

5.5.1. Practical recommendations for managers and employees

Practical recommendations that have been recommended by the researcher for the organisation was based on the findings of the study and where the researcher discovered problems which need to be attended to as soon as possible.

5.5.1.1. Awareness and educational initiatives

The organisation should increase awareness and educational initiatives on the concept of micro-inequities which should include the various forms, the short-term and long-term effects on the organisation and individuals; and the way to deal with it in an appropriate way as this study showed that there are various forms of micro-inequities which cause vast effects such as changes in behaviour, work performance and emotions. Educating employees about this phenomenon will teach them how to deal with issues such as being able to confront their perpetrators when they feel unfairly treated and being able to inform superiors about their issues so that action can be taken.

5.5.1.2. Qualitative research

Conduct wide-spread qualitative surveys and face-to-face in-depth interviews within the organisation, with the aim of establishing the nature and existence of the micro-inequities that are experienced; as well as, the impact that is felt. Once this is done, the Human Resource department need to implement strategies and support structures according to the issues they discover. Getting an insight on how employees within the organisation feel and what they experience on a regular basis will also show that the organisation cares for their well-being which could decrease the level of deviant behaviour that employees show to their environment and towards their managers and supervisors.

5.5.1.3. Policies and roadshows

Implement diversity management policies which incorporate the awareness of micro-inequities and roadshows on Human Resource policies, processes and support structures related to an improved code of conduct, employee relations and micro-inequities. This implementation may increase organisational effectiveness which may create a more conducive work environment for all. These policies can also create a call for internal disciplinary action as micro-inequities are not deemed as a call for external legal action in the court of law.

5.5.1.4. Sessions of emotional support and psychological help

Employees within the organisation showed major negative changes in emotional state and behaviour thus regular interactive sessions to build up team morale, and individual behaviour as well as organisational behaviour as well as the provision of emotional support after incidents have been reported. Professional counsellors should be on site to assist employees as a form of emotional and psychological support.

5.5.1.5. Re-evaluate and develop accordingly

Re-evaluation of the organisation's culture and values with the aim of implementing good communication channels where trust and support is achieved, and the development of strict and assertive measures to deal with perpetrators could assist in building positive organisational effectiveness in the long-run as the effects of micro-inequities seemed to be more negative than positive.

5.5.1.5. Change of management styles

Management styles need re-evaluation where balance needs to be in place and immense training of people management skills need to be done thereof. Furthermore, managers need to be taught how to handle and communicate with their employees appropriately and promote micro-affirmations within their organisation through the appropriate management styles they newly adopt;

5.5.1.6. Protect victims

Robust focus on protecting victims when they are faced with micro-inequities by acting on the problem timeously and provide a platform where complaints can be dealt with in confidence. This is to ensure that victims are not victimised at a later stage which may create more micro-inequities in the workplace.

5.5.1.7. Micro-affirmations

Employees need to be more aware of their environment and practice subtle positive behaviours towards their colleagues such as being kind, talking appropriately to one another and promoting positive gestures to increase self-esteem and togetherness within the organisation. Micro-affirmations could gradually help in changing organisational behaviour which may make the job of the Human Resource Department more manageable in bringing change.

5.5.1.8. Confront matters appropriately

Employees need to adopt a progressive complain channel such that when they feel as if they have been treated in a specific manner, in relation to micro-inequities, they can approach their perpetrators in a calm manner and if the matter still persists, victims can approach their superiors to handle the situation. However, this requires management to make an effort to increase trust between them and

their employees, so that employees can feel comfortable when they approach management about their issues.

5.5.2. Recommendations on literature and methodology

This study contributes greatly to the body of knowledge because there is such a limited amount of research done on micro-inequities especially from a South African perspective. This study brings into light that there are intervening concepts such as perception, emotion and attitude that determine the intensity of the micro-inequity being portrayed by a perpetrator or felt by the victim. This topic can be further researched as micro-inequities as a topic is hardly researched from a Human Resource Management perspective. It also needs to be researched further because it poses a huge threat to organisations in relation to productivity.

This contribution to the body of knowledge gives more insight to the concept of micro-inequities, its nature and effects. Furthermore, the framework that was created by the researcher can be modified or re-used in order to test the trustworthiness of the literature especially in future studies. This study adds great value to the human resource management field and this concept needs to be taken into consideration in organisations, as it was found in this study that it creates problems within organisations.

The use of the methodology contributed greatly to this study as the adopted methodology helped the researcher gain personal experiences and in-depth information which increases the knowledge of micro-inequities within an organisation. However, the use of interviews may have brought some limitations to the study such that the interviewer might have influenced participants' responses by explaining to them concept of micro-inequities as all of the participants did not know what micro-inequities are, even though they experience it every day.

The sample size of the study could be increased by alternatively using another sampling technique because the use of convenience sampling may have restricted the amount of data received within this study due to time constraints from the employees of the organisation and their availability to participate in the study.

5.5.3. Recommendations for future research

5.5.3.1. Comparative study: location

More research needs to be done in other South African organisations, preferably a comparison of two organisations within the same industry, in order to increase the body of knowledge from a South African perspective and show distinct differences or similarities with regards to micro-inequities and its effects in the workplace.

5.5.3.2. Increase demographic information

Future research on micro-inequities should incorporate a vast representation of race, gender, age, tenure, and educational levels in order to provide an in-depth perspective across the various demographic information. The incorporation of skills levels of employees and their race or gender could also bring insight on the types of relationship that exist in relation to micro-inequities in the workplace

5.5.3.3. Adding more research objectives

More research objectives should be added in future studies such as exploring why some people exert negative behaviours on others, determining organisational effects of micro-inequities, and investigating what factors contribute to micro-inequities in the workplace.

5.5.3.4. Increase sample size

Increase the sample size of the study to gather more representation. Also, this can be increased by increasing the target population of the study such that one can create a larger target sample.

5.5.3.5. Comparative study: Employees versus management

Conduct a comparative study of micro-inequities between employees and management to determine the difference and similarities in the nature and effects of micro-inequities experienced.

5.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of the study were summarised in chapter one of this study. This section will provide more insight on the limitations of the study regarding the different aspects within the study such as limitations of literature, research methodology adopted and data analysis and the overall study.

- i. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, a small sample size and a case study approach, findings in this study could not be generalised to all organisations in South Africa.
- ii. The organisation gave the researcher a time constraint which stated that data may not be collected in the last week of the month and the preferred period to collect data would be during the first two weeks of the month. This time constraint meant that the researcher had to recruit participants to participate in this study in a quick manner as there was a restriction in the researcher's time line and the permission from the organisation. The researcher had to make means to go to the location within the two weeks specified in order not to disturb the activities of the organisation thus this limited the flexibility of time.
- iii. Most participants did not know what micro-inequities are even though they go through it every day; therefore, the researcher had to explain the concept and give examples

before the interviews were conducted. This, however, would have possibly influenced the responses from participants as they may have given responses to satisfy the researcher's objectives of this study.

- iv. The researcher had access to only one branch of the company, therefore results were limited to one geographical area due to costs and time constraints. The limitation to using one geographical location meant that the results obtained could not be generalised to all branches in different locations.
- v. The use of convenience sampling did not allow the researcher to get more participants at all skill levels, this was due to their jobs which required them to be at their work stations thus decreasing the availability to the researcher.
- vi. The sample size was small as data saturation was researched at a sample size of 13. This may have had limitations on data richness that the study could have produced.
- vii. The concept of Micro-inequities is a very rare topic that is hardly researched. It was difficult gathering literature as it was also limited. The abstract and sensitive nature of this topic had many ethical issues which were then removed after a lot of consideration. Most of the citations utilised were from an international perspective which meant that the researcher had to mainly adopt and adapt it to a South African perspective.
- viii. The sensitive nature of this topic also brought doubt in participants as they felt apprehensive to participate. There was a lack of trust as they believed that if they shared their experiences it would not be kept confidential and thus later victimised. This brought a limitation to the number of participants that could have actually participated in the study which could have brought in more data.
- ix. Some participants were poor English speakers. Despite this, the researcher made effort to re-ask participants to test if true meaning was captured; however, this may have influenced the responses that some of these participants gave because they could not explain further in the English language.
- x. The researcher used interviews as a data collection method for the first time in her academic career. Due to this, the researcher was not highly skilled in doing interviews. Research gathered is dependent on the skills of the interviewer, so participants may have been uncomfortable with the way the researcher may have asked some questions; furthermore, the way the questions were asked brought a lot of narrative from the interviewee which made it tedious for analysis. When analysing the data, the researcher may have missed out other emerging themes which could have been discussed because of the long narratives from the interviewee.
- xi. Due to financial constraints, the researcher could not purchase a professional audio-recorder; thus, the researcher used a phone and laptop to record simultaneously. At times, some of the recordings were not clear when the researcher was transcribing. This meant

that some data was left out and could not be analysed accordingly. However, despite this constraint, effort was made to keep all recordings safe and later on disposed to maintain confidentiality.

- xii. Most of the information in the literature was based on secondary data and had older citations. The researcher, with this regard, had to make current assumptions based on old data and adopt it to a South African perspective using journals from the field of psychology. This posed has a huge limitation has there was limited literature regarding micro-inequities in the context of the workplace, but rather from a psychological perspective.

Most of the limitations could not be avoided; however, the researcher made effort to counteract some of the limitations that arose. Future researchers can make necessary changes in order to mitigate these limitations that were found in this study.

5.7. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that employees of all occupational levels used in this study have faced micro-inequities in one form or another as established during the semi-structured interviews, and that their experiences were not pleasing. However, one cannot conclude that all employees in the organisation and even other organisations in South Africa have been victims of micro-inequities, since the sample size of this study is not substantially generalizable to justify the conclusion. In order to have a reasonable conclusion on the concept of micro-inequities, additional studies should be performed using more generalizable samples.

The researcher believes that the adopted research methodology contributed to the success of this study. Participants were able to share their experiences wilfully, despite the sensitivity of the topic; moreover, they learned more about micro-inequities and their effects. The findings of this study will add to current body of knowledge regarding micro-inequities especially from a South African perspective. This topic may be further researched to gain more insight as micro-inequities is an issue that employees face; and where Human Resource managers must take action to ensure that there is a conducive work environment for all.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

School of Management, IT and Governance

Dear Respondent,

Research Project

Researcher: Liza Murugas (Telephone number: 071 868 6150) (Email: 214508374@stu.ukzn.ac.za) **Supervisor:** Ashika Maharaj (Telephone number: [031 260 8182]) (Email: [maharajash.ukzn.ac.za]) **Research Office:** Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration, Govan Mbeki Building, Westville Campus, Tel: + 27 (0)31 260 8350, Email: hssreclms@ukzn.ac.za

I, **Liza Murugas** am a **MCom** student in the **school of Management, IT and Governance** at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project titled: **The nature and effects of the concept of micro-inequities within the workplace**

The aim of this study is to: To explore the nature of micro-inequities that exist in the organisation; to determine the effects of micro-inequities on employees in the organisation; and to ascertain the organisation's support structures to manage micro-inequities.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research project. Confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained by the researcher and the school of Management, IT and Governance, UKZN. All collected data will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed after 5 years.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSS/0910/018M).

The interview should take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely

Researcher's

signature_____

Date_____

Liza Murugas

This page is to be retained by participant

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

School of Management, IT and Governance

Research Project

Researcher: Liza Murugas (Telephone number:071 868 6150) (Email: 214508374@stu.ukzn.ac.za) **Supervisor:** Ashika Maharaj (Telephone number: [031 260 8182]) (Email: [maharajash.ukzn.ac.za])**Research Office: Humanities & Social Sciences**

Research

Ethics Administration, Govan Mbeki Building, Westville Campus, Tel: 27 31

2604557, Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT

I _____ (full names of participant) 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, where applicable I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

This page is to be retained by researcher

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Data collection instrument: semi-structured interview questions

The following proposed interview guide will be utilised in this study. The interview guide consists of 10 questions that unlock the study's questions and aims. These questions will be asked by the interviewer where the interview will take approximately take 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form showing their willingness to participate in the study and their willingness to be recorded by the interviewer.

Interview guide

1. Do you believe that micro-inequities exist in this organisation? In your opinion, why do you think micro-inequities exist in this organisation?
2. What kind of micro-inequities have you personally experienced or have witnessed someone experience? Describe the micro-inequity that was experienced
3. In your own understanding, do micro-inequities effect employees? If yes, how do microinequities effect employees?
4. When you witnessed or experienced a micro-inequity, how did it affect you? How did you feel or react? And what was done about the situation?
5. When employees are faced with micro-inequities, how do you think they react to it? Do you believe that their performance deceases if they experience micro- inequities? If yes, what signs and indications do employees possess that show you that their performance is decreasing or has decreased
6. What do you think motivates an individual to exhibit negative behaviours on other employees in the workplace? What can be done to mitigate or eradicate such negative behaviours?
7. What support measures and processes are available for victims of micro-inequities in this organisation? If there are any, do you think it is effective and helpful?
8. What interventions and strategies can you propose for this organisation in order to discourage and prevent micro-inequities?
9. In your opinion, how can all employees help to reduce or combat the effects of micro-inequities in this organisation?

10. What solutions would you recommend to the Human Resource department to address issues of micro-inequities in this organisation?

APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE REPORT



29 May 2019

Ms Liza Murugas (214508374)
School of Management, IT & Governance
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Murugas,

Protocol reference number : HSS/0910/018M

New project title: The nature and effects of micro-inequities within the workplace

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 03 May 2019 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in Title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

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 period of 3 years from the date of original issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Ashika Maharaj
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Isabel Martins
cc School Administrator: Ms Debbie Cunynghame

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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