

# Exploring teamwork paradoxes challenging 21st-century cross-cultural conflict management in a multicultural organizational context

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on cross-cultural conflict and its management in a multicultural work environment affected by teamwork paradoxes, as perceived and experienced by multicultural team members working in project and management teams. A mixed research methodology was applied, using a quantitative confirmation of teamwork paradoxes in multicultural organizational environments, followed by a qualitative interpretivist approach exploring the perceived and felt cross-cultural conflicts and its management within the teamwork paradox context. Eight multicultural teamwork paradoxes were confirmed by 107 respondents to a survey questionnaire. Next, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 33 participants exploring cross-cultural conflict and its management within the eight identified teamwork paradoxes. The qualitative thematic data analysis provided insightful information on cross-cultural conflict management in multicultural team paradoxes relevant to project and management teams in a multicultural South African context. The multicultural team paradoxes and their managerial implications are explained in terms of cross-cultural conflict management on multiple levels.

## Keywords

cross-cultural conflict, multicultural challenges, multiple identity, South Africa, teamwork paradoxes

Increasing numbers of organizations are embracing a team approach in their quest for organizational performance improvement to meet the demands and challenges of the 21st-century workplace.

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However, the dynamics of teamwork in a multicultural organizational environment may pose more challenges than teamwork per se and may lead to new areas of cross-cultural conflict that must be managed. Most managers in today's collaborative and consultative environments need to develop teams and team leadership to achieve better results through others, but very often the desired synergistic effect of teamwork does not materialize, because of unresolved conflict. These unresolved team conflicts pose new challenges in cross-cultural management. Resilient teams that can deal with conflict in a constructive manner can assist managers and make organizations more efficient and effective, but the converse is also true – weak teams, which often perceive conflict as a threat, can severely debilitate workplace relations and reduce organizational performance.

Although there are many opinions regarding teamwork, conflict management and cross-cultural management, the general interest in teams and what they can accomplish remains. As a consequence of the popularity of teams as early as 1990, 80 percent of companies with more than 100 employees (Gordon, 2002) have implemented teams, often without understanding the complexity and dynamics, causing constructive and/or destructive conflict that has to be managed to ensure efficient and effective cross-cultural teamwork, especially in multicultural environments.

Conflict management, teamwork and cross-cultural management have been widely studied, yet we still face several challenges in all these areas, especially in a multicultural society such as South Africa, which is the focus in this study. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that some authors are doubtful about the true efficacy of teamwork in organizations. Allen and Hecht (2004: 433) refer to 'the romance of teams', reminding us that teams are not necessarily the solution to all organizational problems. They mention that empirical data on team effectiveness are not as noteworthy as the theories on teams suggest. Naquin and Tynan (2003: 2) argue that team complexities are often not fully understood where teams are employed. It is Mueller's (1994) view that many of the difficulties encountered in organizations attempting teamwork arise from a lack of comprehension and appreciation of the unique historical context and cultural legacy into which it is being introduced, as with the case of the apartheid legacy and the post-1994 democratization process in South Africa.

Cross-cultural, transcultural and multicultural aspects of teamwork in a diverse society such as South Africa and the possible complexities of such teamwork, including the reasons for cross- or trans-cultural conflict, its impact and management have not been researched sufficiently. Mayer (2008) did a study on a selected South African automotive industry case, which contributed to the understanding of complexities of (transcultural) conflict and constructive conflict resolution in organizations by considering the values and identity aspects of those individuals involved. More than 25 years of personal experience of South African multicultural organizations has shown that team members often covertly and/or overtly express frustration or disillusionment, which, if not managed effectively, can cause destructive conflict and be a barrier to team performance. In their research on multicultural teams, Brett et al. (2006) acknowledge that such obstacles are often very subtle, difficult to recognize and present themselves clearly as a dilemma only after significant damage has already been done.

In a recent study, Joshi and Roh (2009) encourage researchers to take context into account when they do research involving multicultural aspects, as in South Africa, where employees, management and teams in organizations are diverse and usually multicultural in composition. According to these authors, contextual consideration facilitates multi-level analysis and creates a better understanding of complex paradoxical environments characterized by diversity and multicultural phenomena including cross-cultural conflict management in teams, as discussed in this paper. Several authors have identified the need for more research on cultural paradox (Fang, 2005–6; Osland and Bird, 2000), which in their view includes paradoxical values and possible behavioural orientations that coexist within a national culture.

In this paper, cross-cultural conflict and its management within multicultural teamwork paradoxes in a diverse South African context are explored. Multi-level cross-cultural conflict management approaches that might assist multicultural organizations in achieving a better understanding of the complexities and resulting team paradoxes that cause conflict, especially in project and managerial teams, are discussed. The researcher has had decades of direct involvement with multicultural teams and team interventions in South Africa as, *inter alia*, facilitator, trainer, training and development manager, business consultant, organizational development (OD) practitioner and experienced organizational behaviourist. She has conducted hundreds of team interventions and has advised many clients on the most suitable team approach for their organization. Lengthy experience and an awareness of the vast body of research and existing theory on teamwork, conflict management, cross-cultural and transcultural management and organizational performance brings a continual realization that team interventions do not always seem to make teams work efficiently and effectively.

In many cases, multicultural complexities and team dynamics in the form of possible cross- and transcultural conflict hinder optimal team development and performance. *This phenomenon needs to be explored to create an understanding of how individuals from multicultural backgrounds experience teamwork paradoxes and the possible cross-cultural causes of conflict on multiple levels in the current South African business environment, which is made especially challenging and complex because of its historical legacy and from cultural point of view.*

In my opinion, an understanding of cross- and transcultural conflict and performance in teamwork in the current South African organizational context requires a thorough understanding and acknowledgement of the fundamental paradoxes and conflicts inherent in multicultural teamwork. This study is of particular significance to the current South African organizational environment, where the emphasis in the new democracy has been placed on the development of equality, cross-cultural relationships, and the skills and competencies of employees. However due to the study's focus on project and management teams, it has a broader international significance.

The concept of paradox is drawn on to identify and describe the tensions and contradictions which are also referred to as perceived and felt conflict experienced by members of multicultural teams in 21st-century South African organizations. The research questions to be answered in this paper are the following:

- What teamwork paradoxes and related cross-cultural conflicts do multicultural team members in 21st-century South African organizations experience?
- What are the perceived and felt cross-cultural conflicts and multi-level managerial implications within the multicultural teamwork paradoxes?

The study starts with a brief literature review, which will attempt mainly to clarify the key concepts and present the theoretical basis of this paper, as it is impossible to review the extensive literature on the topic within the scope of an article of this nature. This is followed by an explanation of the research methodology used in this study to answer the research questions, and the results.

## **Literature review**

### *Understanding paradox and conflict in a multicultural team context*

A paradox is a specific type of challenge – it implies a contradiction or disagreement; and it is a concept that has proven useful in developing insights into a variety of organizational phenomena

(Chae and Bloodgood, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). All contradictions refer to statements that express or assert the opposite of another statement. In a paradox, two conditions coexist although this seems logically impossible. It is my belief as a researcher that the paradoxes or disagreements that exist in multicultural teams, as perceived and/or experienced by the team members, can exacerbate existing cultural conflict, especially destructive conflict, resulting in frustration and dismay if they are not identified, understood and managed constructively and in a timely manner.

As paradoxes involve the concurrence of logically opposed statements, resolutions are likely to be tentative and temporary. Continuing paradoxical practices inevitably sustains inherent tensions, which is a basis for conflict, rather than its resolution. If this reasoning holds true, it is anticipated that team members will continue to experience long-standing tensions between opposing elements, particularly in multicultural settings.

Thus, rather than 'resolving' paradoxes, team members may more accurately be said to be coping with or 'surviving' paradoxes. Management must therefore recognize and manage the implications of paradoxes in teamwork (Dubé and Robey, 2008: 6). However, perhaps we could create an environment in which these team/cultural paradoxes can coexist, which appears to be implied in some of the latest discussions in research on culture in a global context, for example, in Bird and Fang's (2009: 140) statement:

It seems that globalization has given rise to a paradoxical movement of cultures. It seems if two constructs are steering the paradoxical movement of cultures: (1) *cultural ecology* with uniquely embedded local political institutions, climate, language, traditions and customs; and (2) *cultural learning* of values and practices as a consequence of cultural clashes in the marketplace.

When these paradoxes are not well managed, they can give rise to more conflict and negative teamwork experiences, discouraging team members from continued participation in teams. Negative team experiences create a negative attitude towards teamwork that is carried into the workplace (Pfaff and Huddleston, 2003; Ruiz Ulloa and Adams, 2004).

### ***Teamwork in multicultural organizations***

A team in a multicultural organization usually consists of individual members of diverse origins with different cultures, values and identities, who have to work together in team structures, resulting in a scenario with the potential for conflict to escalate (Brett et al., 2006). Pondy (1992: 257) states that many organizations are challenged by conflict, causing severe emotional distress and disengagement from work, which according to Cowan (1995: 24) affects decision-making and work relationships negatively and decreases individual effectiveness, productivity and creativity.

It became apparent from the literature review and research in companies that three apparently distinct types of teamwork are commonly in use. This finding corresponds with those of Parry et al. (1998: 169). The first of these three types of team is the 'Self Directed Team' or management team, and its purpose is to create greater flexibility and innovation in permanent work groups. In such applications, companies frequently use empowerment in an attempt to improve levels of local commitment and accountability. The second type, which is mainly a 'Production Team', is found in companies operating a 'lean production' system, with the emphasis on quality, continuous improvement and productivity. Here, a tightly organized production system demands teamwork to ensure maximum waste reduction, and to manage an essentially delicate system. The third type is the 'Project Team', commonly found in concurrent engineering and consulting. Its main purpose is

to sustain cross-functional teamwork across internal organizational boundaries, with the objective of delivering results faster, more cost effectively and with agreed quality. The literature and personal experience are consistent with Parry et al.'s (1998: 169) comment that teamwork is 'best understood in terms of overall organizational patterns rather than through analysis of narrowly drawn sets of team properties'. In this paper, the emphasis is on project and management teams, rather than on production teams.

### *Understanding culture in multicultural teams within 21st-century organizations*

Culture is a very complex concept, as the term can be viewed from various scholarly perspectives. Earley et al. (2006: 20) describe culture as 'the patterned ways in which people think, feel and react to various situations and actions which are acquired and shared among people through the use of symbols and artefacts'.

Bird and Fang (2009: 140) perceive culture 'as having a life of its own full of paradox and change in a dialectical movement'. Very different cultures, based on their values, for example, can coexist within the same society (culture) based on the Yin Yang philosophy of Fang (2005–6: 77–8). Bird and Fang (2009: 140) reason that 'human beings, organizations, and cultures intrinsically embrace paradoxes for their sheer existence and healthy development'.

The following cultural descriptions, acknowledging the vast literature on culture, were applied in the current study to create meaning from the semi-structured interviews exploring cross-cultural team conflict within the identified multicultural team paradoxes (taken from Thomas and Inkson, 2003: 24–7):

- culture is something that is shared by a group of people;
- it consists of enduring patterns of behaviour that are built up over a long period of time;
- culture has a powerful influence on behaviour, leading to behavioural patterns that are often difficult to break;
- culture consists of an organized system of values, attitudes, beliefs and meanings that are embedded in an environmental context; and
- culture can be compared to an iceberg, where the deep underlying values and assumptions of a culture are at the invisible base of the iceberg, as depicted in Figure 1.

In Figure 1 a simplistic framework of the complex culture construct is provided which identifies two main domains of culture: the overt, which is visible and fairly easy to observe, and the covert, with various levels of depth which are not easily observed and need a deeper understanding of culture to explain. In this study both these domains of culture were explored in the qualitative analysis of multicultural teamwork paradoxes. Seminal research indicates that culture is deeply linked to individual identity. Thus identity is strongly connected to cultural norms and group identities and can be described as 'the norms, beliefs, practices, and traditions with which one engages one's environment' (Seymour, 2003). The 21st-century organizational environment differs from that of a traditional organization in that it is highly competitive and often has to adapt itself to external environmental needs (Nadler and Tushman, 1999).

An individual's identity in the team is constructed through his or her identification with or social belonging to individuals, groups and/or organizations, within a specific environment and is therefore a result of in-group and out-group processes that can be defined through work profession, status, socialization, gender, lifestyle, social behaviour, social and family positions, racial and ethnic

<b><i>Overt cultural elements or surface elements (S)</i></b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obvious characteristics</li> <li>• Economic and social conditions</li> <li>• Language, appearance</li> </ul>
<b><i>Covert cultural elements or Deeper cultural elements (D)</i></b>	Relational environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political, rules and regulations</li> <li>• Authority</li> </ul>
	Interpersonal Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relational role, Status</li> <li>• Gender role</li> </ul>
	Fundamental Beliefs and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dimensions of time, space</li> <li>• Religion, Beliefs</li> <li>• Ideology/world view</li> <li>• Tradition</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.** Overt and covert cultural dimensions (author's own)

background, religion, language and societal class (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). This means that an individual or group member could have multiple identities, and in a multicultural group these multiple identities (or multiple cultures) need to coexist. These multiple identities of the individual and group could change their degree of importance, depending on the organizational context.

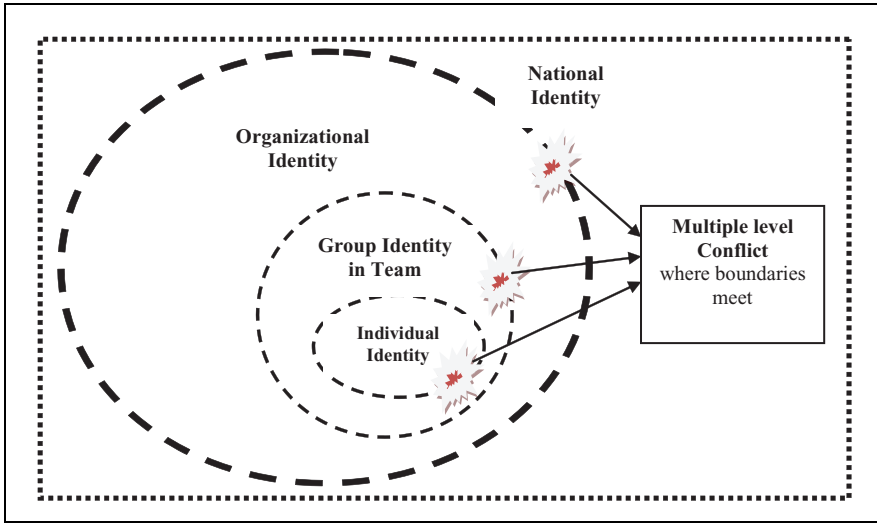
Ferdman (1995: 49–50) explains these multiple cultural identity structures by using Cox's model of cultural identity: an individual can adopt multiple group identities. Hence, social and identity multiplicity provide positive outcomes and flexibility on the one hand (Holzinger and Dhalla, 2007), but also create the potential for new conflict on the other hand.

This understanding underpinned the decision in this study to make appointments for individual interviews with team members rather than to use focus groups to explore the team paradoxes and cross-cultural conflicts from an individual perspective.

### ***Understanding conflict within a multicultural team context***

Conflict arises when an individual or a group perceives differences and disagreement between the self and the other about interests, beliefs or needs and values (De Dreu et al., 1999). Jehn (1997) identifies two kinds of conflict, namely task and relationship conflicts. Task conflicts generally relate to the substantial means or the distribution of resources, procedures and policies, and judgements and interpretation of facts. Relationship conflicts are generally more personalized and led by personal issues, political preferences, values and interpersonal communication styles (Desivilya et al., 2010: 28–40). Simons and Peterson (2000) concluded from their extant literature review that groups who experience task conflict have a tendency to make better decisions, because such conflict promotes better cognitive understanding of the matter being deliberated. On the contrary, relationship conflict is inclined to restrict the information diffusion ability of the group because group members focus their time and energy on each other rather than on the group's task-related problems.

Transcultural conflict (Waters, 1992: 438) occurs when communication crosses cultural lines and often results in either constructive or destructive consequences (Grab, 1996: 35). This implies that conflict can build relationships or be constructive if it is managed sensibly. Contradictory or



**Figure 2.** Multiple identities within a multicultural team and multiple-level conflict

opposing (paradoxical) values and identity can cause intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts (Coy and Woehle, 2000), which could inflict destruction in a group, or can be used constructively.

Therefore to manage cross-cultural conflict in multicultural teams, a deeper understanding of the multiple levels of culture and cultural identity, the multiple causes of conflict and the organizational context is needed, as depicted in Figure 2. According to Pondy (1992), it involves the identification and analysis of organizational conflict, as well as effective techniques and methods that elicit new solutions for conflict management, in this case, in a multicultural team-based organizational context.

## Research methodology

Earley and Singh (1995: 330–5) caution that the evolving nature and complexity of international and cultural research poses many challenges, including the classification of specific research approaches that are employed. They mention that the ‘hybrid form is the most promising approach’, as it is a combination of ‘Gestalt’ and ‘Reduced’ approaches. It enables a researcher to ‘analyse relationships and understand processes, underlying and embedded, in a system’ (the Reduced approach) and to explore ‘complex relationships that are interdependent or context-specific’ (the Gestalt approach) (Earley and Singh, 1995: 334). This made the hybrid form a suitable research approach for this study.

In answering the research questions, the methodology applied, aligned with the hybrid form, comprised of mixed methods. An initial quantitative analysis and confirmation of team paradoxes in multicultural team settings was applied, followed by a more elaborate qualitative interpretivist approach of exploring the cross-cultural conflict and its management focusing on the eight multicultural teamwork paradoxes identified in the South African context.

### *The quantitative part of the study*

A survey questionnaire of ten teamwork paradoxes, indicated in Table 1, developed by Du Plessis and Barkhuizen (2010), based on research by Grove (2008), was administered to experienced team

**Table 1.** Ten teamwork paradoxes experienced by team members in 21st-century organizations in South Africa (Du Plessis and Barkhuizen, 2010)

- 
1. Strong individuality (independence), but also strong team player (interdependence)
  2. Teams need freedom and creativity (flexibility), but also clear guidelines and norms (structure)
  3. Teams suffer from an information overload, but do not communicate enough
  4. Work harder and smarter, but also maintain a work-life balance
  5. Teams are important, but our organizational systems do not support teamwork
  6. Having fun whilst delivering results
  7. Relationship building, whilst delivering results (people – vs. task – orientation)
  8. We hire for skills or IQ, but expect emotional intelligence
  9. We implement team activities, but fail to create a team culture
  10. We say we embrace change through teamwork, but we do not comprehend 'flux'
- 

members from diverse backgrounds in management and project teams in various South African companies. A purposive convenience sampling technique was used. The questionnaire was distributed in hard copy to 152 team members, and 107 responses were received. Descriptive statistics were done, as explained in the data analysis, which confirmed eight team paradoxes relevant to multicultural teams, as indicated in Tables 1 and 3. These are described later.

### *The qualitative part of the study*

Since qualitative research seeks a deeper understanding of social behaviour and phenomena, the need is for focused and usually smaller samples, as opposed to random, large samples (Giddens, 1990). This part of the study was instrumental in gaining access to a group of diverse individual team members' perceptions and experiences from different cultural groupings, instead of relying on reports from members of only a few teams or focus groups. Semi-structured individual interviews of approximately 40 minutes each were conducted with 33 volunteers from the initial sample group of 107 who completed the survey. To be a potential respondent, a person had to be or recently had to have been either a team manager or team member of a multicultural team for at least three years in a South African organization and belong to one of the 11 official South African ethnic/language groupings. These languages are English and Afrikaans (spoken as a primary language by Whites, and people of mixed and Indian descent, and used as a *lingua franca*), and nine of the indigenous languages, isiZulu (spoken by Zulus and widely used by about 24 percent of the population), isiXhosa (spoken by Xhosas and used by about 18 percent of the population), isiNdebele (spoken by Ndebele people, especially in the north), Sesotho (also known as South Sotho), Sepedi (also known as North Sotho), Tshivenda (spoken by Venda people, mainly in the north), Setswana (related to Sesotho and Sepedi, and also the official language of Botswana), Siswati (spoken by people from the Swaziland region) and Xitsonga (spoken by the Shangaan-Tsonga people, mainly in the north). Respondents were classified in terms of the language they indicated as their primary language, rather than by specific ethnic group or descent.

The most important indicator for sample size when conducting qualitative research is often the point of redundancy, also called theoretical saturation of the data. The final qualitative sample ended when members of most cultural groupings had been interviewed and theoretical saturation was reached, in other words, when nothing new was learned from the thick descriptions given by participants.

The respondents had an average of 8.2 years multicultural teamwork experience. They represented nine of the eleven South African cultural or official ethnic/language groupings with a



nearly equal number in terms of gender and race: males (18) to females (15) and Blacks (16) to Whites (17).

The individual semi-structured interviews were focused, by using open questions, in an exploratory manner, to assist in the flow and capturing of the data collection for ease of the data analysis process. The process and structure of the interviews were as follows. First, the interviewee was given a number, I.1 to I.33, whereafter the assurance was given of confidentiality and that recordings would be made to ensure transparency and trustworthiness of data capturing. The respondents already understood the purpose of the research as they all participated in the quantitative part. The biographic information was captured in terms of sex (male or female), age, language grouping (South African 11 national languages) and years experience in multicultural project teams or management teams in South Africa.

The interviewee was asked to recall one or more experience and speak openly and freely about incidents, situations and how they felt. The question asked was: *Thinking about your experience in multicultural teams, could you please describe a specific situation or incident where you have experienced or felt conflict due to the cultural differences in your team as a result or in relation to this specific contradiction (paradoxical situation)?* (The interviewer mentioned the teamwork paradoxes, one by one, which they already understood from the survey completed a month prior.) Further probing occurred for clarity where necessary by asking viewpoints on the cultural dimensions and experienced conflict and how they might apply in the incidents.

Data were recorded and notes were made during each of the 40-minute interviews which took place over a period of one month.

## Data analysis and interpretation

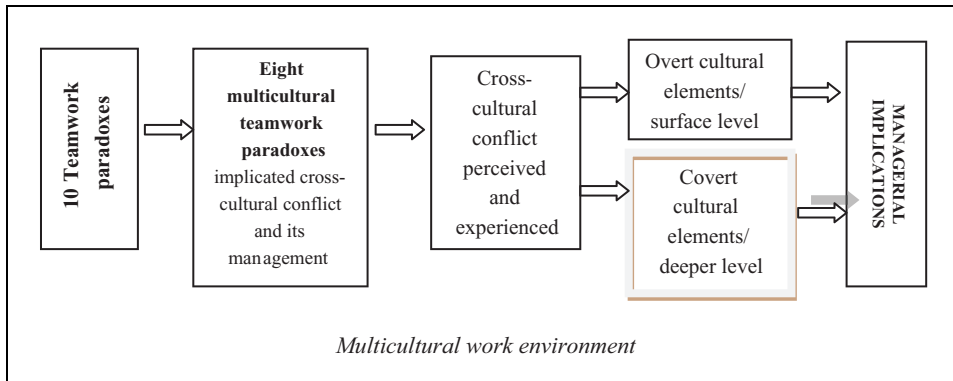
The data analysis, its flow and interpretation are explained in Figure 3. The majority of cross-cultural conflicts are due to the overt cultural elements or deeper level of culture, indicated with a (D), and the surface level cultural conflicts were indicated with an (S).

### Quantitative data analysis

The 107 responses received from the survey questionnaire on ten teamwork paradoxes were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true) to 7 (very true) as perceived and experienced by the multicultural respondents in cross-cultural conflict situations in multicultural teamwork environments. The majority of the participants in this sample were members of project teams (65 percent) and were male (55 percent). A total of 52 percent indicated that they enjoyed working in a team, but 85 percent said that teams were not working the way they should in their organization. This expressed dissatisfaction with teamwork suggests the presence of possible destructive conflict.

In the sample group of 107, the participants had an average of 7.4 years of multicultural teamwork experience in South African organizations and were representative of the South African demographic in terms of the gender profile, males (55 percent) and females (45 percent). The sample represented the following industries: Consulting – IT, management, engineering (53 percent), Manufacturing (17 percent), Telecommunications (10 percent) and Mining (20 percent). The participants represented nine of the 11 official ethnic/language groups in South Africa.

The survey data were statistically analysed and confirmed eight of the ten teamwork paradoxes as mutually relevant to contributing to cross-cultural conflict situations evident in multicultural project and management teams, as indicated in bold in Table 1. The two team paradoxes, as set out in Table 1



**Figure 3.** Data analysis, its flow and interpretation

in italics, that were seen as less relevant to cross-cultural conflict in multicultural settings were; 5, ‘Teams are important, but our organizational systems do not support teamwork’, and 8, ‘We hire for skills or IQ, but expect emotional intelligence’, as these paradoxes are probably related more to organizational systems than to specific cross-cultural aspects.

### Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data analysis relied on the basic premises of content and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998: 1; Weber, 1985), interview analysis (Kvale, 1996) and the use of data reduction methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data analysis is a subjective process that originates between the researcher, the data and the interviewee. With this in mind the researcher made an effort to manage possible biases, through the connection of analysis and interpretation of data to theory and experiences in cultural diverse teams. Each interview transcript was carefully reviewed, bearing in mind the definitions of paradox or contradiction, culture and teams within the South African context, and notes were taken to document evidence of cross-cultural conflict statements and the perceptions of multicultural members relating to conflict situations as pertaining to a teamwork paradox, as summarized in Table 2.

The most prevalent interviewee responses and biographical information are set out in Table 2. From these responses, it is clear that conflict is prominent at various levels: the individual, group and organizational levels.

Evidence of cross-cultural conflict elements identified and mentioned in Table 3 are mainly in the covert domain or deeper level of culture as indicated with a (D), which confirms the finding by Brett et al. (2006) that the obstacles related to cross-cultural conflict are often very understated, difficult to recognize and present themselves as a dilemma only after significant damage has already been done. This destructive conflict situation is also clear from the comments made by interviewees, such as

We do not trust each other, that is why we cannot build a relationship . . . Trust and respect is earned and it does not come easily. . . it is a big problem. (Black, Setswana, Male, 50)

. . . the manager has no idea of what we need to do . . . he thinks we can work together and achieve, but it is chaos . . . chaos. . . We are going to sink . . . like the Titanic, BOOM!’ (White, English-speaking, Female, 37)

**Table 2.** Interviewee biographic data and examples of interviewee responses

Teamwork Paradox	Interviewee	Response – Evidence Quotation
1.	I.1 (Black, isiXhosa, male, 29)	'I do not know why White people always wants to be the boss ... because they are not ... that time is over ... they won't control me'
	I.5 (White, English-speaking, male, 46)	'Some are born team players ... I think individuals can hide behind a team ... if they are lazy ... or do not know what to do'
	I.10 (Black, isiZulu, male, 34)	'Competition makes us forget that we are not alone ... it can get nasty ... as they say "the winner takes it all" ... I like winning ... it pays my bills'
	I.22 (White, English-speaking, male, 42)	'Females like talking ... they are good in teams ... but they waste time. Time is money in projects'
	I.2 (Black, Sesotho, female, 28)	'I want direction ... but do not always get it ... I know some of the team members (male), uh ... think I am stupid ... they say I must think for myself ... now I keep quiet'
	I.6 (White, Afrikaans, male, 55)	'I have been in project teams for long...10 years ... I know my job ... nobody must interfere. These youngsters of today think they know everything ... Jis, (Emotion), they know nothing ... I tell you'
	I.23 (White, English-speaking, female, 37)	'The manager has no idea of what we need to do ... he thinks we can work together and achieve, but it is chaos ... chaos ... We are going to sink ... like the Titanic, BOOM!'
	I.11 (Black, isiNdebele, male, 48)	'If you give too much freedom, people think they can stay at home ... no ... this does not work ... yes, we need to be creative and talk, but we must come to work'
	I.28 (Black, isiXhosa, male, 32)	'My culture expects of me to be the one in control as I am male, now I am amongst women, who all talk at once and do not show respect to me – they do not understand ... I have to get them to perform – this frustrates me ... at times I just walk away and then they call me lazy ... or if I react they call me bossy'
	3.	I.32 (White, English-speaking, female, 55)
I.3. (White, Afrikaans, male 44)		'The trees are suffering ... paper overload ... this is supposed to be the knowledge age ... no paper: We talk a lot in meetings, but do we comprehend? I cannot say what I want anymore ... everything is sensitive ... I cannot express myself in the manner I want to'
I.17 (Black, isiXhosa, female, 36)		'We are not all English ... but they expect us to speak like ... ehh ... the Queen of England when we make presentations. I know a lot of us pretend to understand ... but we don't.'
I.31 (Black, Sesotho, female, 30)		'We should really communicate with one another more ... I am scared to talk to some ... especially men, as they might think funny things ... you know men?'

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Teamwork Paradox	Interviewee	Response – Evidence Quotation
4.	<p>I.19 (White, Afrikaans, female, 49)</p> <p>I.9 (White, English-speaking, male, 43)</p> <p>I.7 (Black, isiZulu, female, 29)</p> <p>I.17 (Black, female, Xhosa, 36)</p>	<p>'Yes, some work and others balance their bank accounts ...'</p> <p>'Balance is not in our vocabulary ... not work-life balance. We are sometimes so tired ... too much work ... too little team support'</p> <p>'I would like to work longer hours ... but I am a single mother and need to go home early ... some do not understand this'</p> <p>'I sometimes feel like staying home and play sick ... I cannot deal with the pressure at work, having to do so many things ... we do not have people to do the work ... well, we have people but they do not work'</p>
5.	<p>I.13 (White, Afrikaans, male, 52)</p> <p>I.24 (White, English-speaking, female, 48)</p> <p>I.30 (Black, Sepedi, male, 27)</p> <p>I.33 (White, English-speaking, male, 55)</p> <p>I.5 (White, male, English-speaking, 46)</p>	<p>'Times have changed ... everyone does not understand if you tease (practical joke) in the right context ... or maybe it come(s) out wrong ... fun are culture sensitive ... I think?'</p> <p>'I cannot enjoy work if people make noise around me ... especially if I have to concentrate ... some people (usually Blacks) are very noisy ... they talk loud ... it drives me crazy'</p> <p>'How can work be fun??? Results and money is all that counts ... then we can enjoy it at home ... or ...?'</p> <p>'Fun has disappeared from work ... we just work ... you cannot tell a joke anymore or just try and have a laugh'</p> <p>'People think you laugh at them ... everybody is so sensitive and see the wrong in everything you try and do'</p>

**Table 3.** Evidence of cross-cultural conflict elements within multicultural teamwork paradoxes

Multicultural teamwork paradox	Cultural themes implicated conflict and its management	Cross-cultural conflict perceived or experienced at work within teams: Exemplary Interview quotes
Strong individuality (independence), but also strong team player (interdependence)	Worldview/cultural orientation (D) Individualistic vs. collectivistic culture (D) Gender roles (D)	'I do not know why <u>White people (S)</u> always wants to be the boss ... because they are not ... that time is over (D) ... they won't control me' (D) (Black, isiXhosa, male, 29) 'Competition make us forget that we are not alone (D) ... it can get nasty ... as they say "the winner takes it all" ... I like winning (D) ... it pays my bills' (Black, isiZulu, male, 34) 'Females like talking ... they are good in teams (D) ... but they waste time (D). Time is money in projects' (White, English-speaking, male, 42)
Teams need freedom and creativity (flexibility), but also clear guidelines and norms (structure)	Traditional views (D): some cultures need clear guidelines which are important and need to remain in place to show respect, whereas others need freedom and flexibility to be innovative and grow the business. Authority(D): different perceptions of authority, some related to age, gender, organizational status or cultural (clan/tribal) status	'I want direction ... but do not always get it ... I know some of the team members (male), uh, think I am stupid (D) ... they say I must think for myself ... now I keep quiet' (Black, Sesotho, female, 28) 'If you give too much freedom (D), people think they can stay at home (D) ... no ... this does not work ... yes, we need to be creative and talk, but we must come to work' (Black, isiNdebele, male, 48) 'My culture expects (D) of me to be the one in control (D) as I am male (D), now I am amongst women, who all talk at once and do not show respect to me (D) – they do not understand I have to get them to perform – this frustrates me ... at times I just walk away and then they call me lazy ... or if I react they call me bossy' (Black, isiXhosa, male, 32)
Teams suffer from an information overload, but do not communicate enough	Language (S): Organizational communication processes do not relate to the needs of people from different cultures and backgrounds Intercultural communication and rituals (D) Shared meaning is a problem Body language used with no common meaning and is easily misunderstood	'We talk a lot about each other and the work, but we fail to communicate to each other (D) to ensure mutual understanding ... there is no 'real' communication ... I don't think we understand each other' (White, English-speaking, female, 55) 'We are not all English ... but they expect us to speak like the Queen of England (S) when we make presentations. I know a lot of us pretend to understand ... but we don't' (Black, isiXhosa, female, 36) 'We should really communicate with one another more ... I am scared to talk to some ... specially men, as they might think funny things (D) ... you know men?' (Black, Sesotho, female, 30)

(continued)

**Table 3 (continued)**

Multicultural teamwork paradox	Cultural themes implicated conflict and its management	Cross-cultural conflict perceived or experienced at work within teams: Exemplary Interview quotes
Work harder and smarter, but also maintain a work-life balance	Work ethic, Tradition (D): some cultural groupings are more relaxed and would like to socialize more. Family structure is more important to some and therefore they seem to spend less time at work	'Yes, some work (D) and others balance their bank accounts' (White, Afrikaans, female, 49) 'I would like to work (D) longer hours ... but I am a single mother (D) and need to go home early ... some do not understand this' (Black, isiZulu, female, 29)
Having fun whilst delivering results	Traditions (D): 'Work is a privilege' vs. 'Work is only to earn a living' Gender role (D): 'Men cannot have their fun if women are around at work' Dimensions of time, space (D): sharing space in offices is a problem and the value of time is different	'Times have changed ... everyone does not understand if you tease (D) (practical joke) in the right context ... or maybe it come(s) out wrong ... fun are culture sensitive – I think?' (White, Afrikaans, male, 52) 'I cannot enjoy work if people make noise around me (S) ... especially if I have to concentrate ... some people (usually Blacks) are very noisy (D) ... they talk load ... it drives me crazy' (White, English-speaking, female, 48) 'How can work be fun (D)?? Results and money is all that counts ... then we can enjoy it at home ... or ...?' (Black, Sepedi, male, 27)
Relationship building, whilst delivering results	Work ethic-rules (D): relations are more important than delivering, work comes first Relationship orientation (D): trust and respect is vital and it is a major problem Dimensions of time, space (D): sharing space can pose a problem	'If you work, you work ... that is what we are paid for ... no work ... no pay (D)' (White, English-speaking, male, 60) 'We do not trust (D) each other that is why we cannot build a relationship ... Trust and respect (D) is earned and it does not come easily ... it is a big problem' (Black, Setswana, male, 50)
We implement team activities, but fail to create a team culture	Cultural diversity is too complex and is not understood There is a lack of cultural intelligence (D)	'Whom can you trust ... tell me ... who? everyone is a politician (D), trying to fill his own pocket ... I wish to trust someone again ... In the workplace ... it is difficult' (White, Afrikaans, male, 54) 'What is teamwork? ... we have a lot of conflict because we do not understand each other ... we do not have common goals' (D) (Black, Afrikaans, female, 44) 'We blame each other (D), but we are a team, Aikhona (no way)' (Black, Xitsonga, female, 38).
We say we embrace change through teamwork, but we do not comprehend 'flux'	Cultural diversity is not understood The complexity of changing behaviour amongst many not understood There is a lack of cultural intelligence (D)	'Someone must keep the stability during change, otherwise there will be a disaster ... but our leaders do not understand (D) this' (Black, English-speaking, female, 39) 'Changing a group of individuals into a team ... a real team is not easy (D) ... we are all so different (S). We must create time to understand each other better and trust each (D) other more' (White, Afrikaans, male, 48)

Trustworthiness of data collection and analysis in this study was established through keeping thick descriptions of data with voice recordings, as well as confirmation of transcripts with the interviewees. As indicated in Table 3, a record was kept of each interviewee's comments; however, all the data could not be included. Thus only the most important data are indicated as evidence here. The possibility of researcher bias, which may influence the categorization and interpretation of results, was acknowledged and minimized through thematic analysis and member checking.

## **Description of findings relating to multicultural teamwork paradoxes**

The quantitative analysis indicated that teamwork did not work well (according to 85 percent of the respondents), resulting in inefficiency and/or non-effectiveness. The lack of management of cross-cultural conflict implied in the teamwork paradoxes contributes to these negative perceptions and experiences of team members in South African multicultural teams. The majority of teamwork (65 percent) was within project teams, which requires focused delivery within a set time, quality and budget. This leads to the assumption that teams are often formed on the basis of existing structures and implemented without understanding the possible paradoxes and more specifically the complexity of cross-cultural conflict pertaining to teamwork paradoxes that come into play in multicultural organizational settings. All of this needs to be understood, acknowledged and managed on multiple levels, that is, the individual level, team level and organizational level, ensuring conflict management and team performance.

In understanding the teamwork paradoxes and possible cross-cultural conflicts implicated by these paradoxes, as well as the managerial implications, a brief description of each teamwork paradox and cross-cultural conflict situation is presented.

### ***Strong individuality, but also strong team player (individualistic vs. collectivistic)***

Many South Africans grew up in an environment where individual performance and competition were stressed and school grades were determined by individual performance, and employment is based on individual skills and personality. However, the majority of South Africans also grew up in a collective environment, with sharing of resources in a collaborative and extended family environment. This 'individualism versus collectivism' paradox poses a source of cross-cultural conflict, as some team members have to transform from a 'solo' or independent mindset to a 'team' or interdependent mindset, and vice versa, which does not happen by itself. Individuals may never have seen the advantages of working in teams, or on the other hand, people from a collectivist background may not see the benefits of taking individual responsibility, yet they are expected to be part of teams where both approaches are required and produce immediate results. Hence, 21st-century organizations need to facilitate this transition if teamwork is ever to succeed. Hyman (1993) points out that, underlying every other responsibility in the team, is the implied responsibility of each individual in that team not to jeopardize the team's goals. In managing this dichotomy, it is important to make team members aware of their multiple identity, preferred paradigm or worldview and to develop shared team goals or team identity that need to be respected.

Booyesen and Nkomo (2007) discuss the tensions due to diversity and social identity conflict management in a South African leadership training context within the post-Apartheid era. Each team member has to understand his or her specific role and identity in attaining team goals. However, if there is not a bond of culture, based on trust, support and general empowerment, this cannot be done; and individuals will continue to act as individuals instead of as part of a team, or hide behind their collective support base, as in the case of the collective industrial strike actions that are rife in South Africa.

### *Teams need freedom and creativity, but also clear guidelines and norms (flexibility vs. structure)*

Teams need a chance to try something new, to put their combined skills to work and to generate their own successes. At the same time, however, clear guidelines and team norms need to apply to ensure focused teamwork. Kazanjian (2007: 21) observes that ‘opportunity is pure oxygen’ for teams. The following question arises, however: ‘Do we all see the same opportunity through our cultural lenses?’ This is where conflict occurs as we are expected to see the challenges or opportunities, but we do not see them at all or we see them from different perspectives. *Having to comply with team norms that have not been aligned with cultural norms is another area of conflict.* In a cross-cultural situation in the 21st century, the team leader’s authority has to be accepted, and he or she must be seen as a trustworthy person who has to guide without dominating the team and has to allow freedom to those team members who are seeking it, but without allowing them too much freedom. Aspects such as the nature of the work, the skills levels and the emotional maturity of the team members should be the guiding principles.

However, in certain ethnic cultural groupings in South Africa, age is a sign of wisdom and needs to be respected, therefore it is likely that younger team leaders may be frowned upon, as their authority is not ‘respected’. The same may apply to gender roles, as in some cultural groups females are not seen as dominant role players, and men may find it difficult to report to a female team leader – one participant, a Black male (IsiXhosa), 32, responded as follows:

My culture expects of me to be the one in control as I am male, now I am amongst women, who all talk at once and do not show respect to me – they do not understand I have to get them to perform – this frustrates me ... at times I just walk away and then they call me lazy ... or if I react they call me bossy.

### *Teams suffer from an information overload, but do not communicate enough*

Katzenbach and Smith (2001: 31) mention that teams should be given the opportunity to choose the manner of expressing themselves, by speaking or in writing, ‘an option that often produces both richer discussions and input and dialogues with fewer interruptions’. *The dilemma with cross-cultural teams is that some cultures express themselves better in writing, whereas others do so better through dialogue and stories.* In South Africa, the majority of official teamwork communication is conducted in English as a ‘business language’, which is often not the best option, as individual members usually come from other language groups. Having to express oneself in different languages is not the answer as information overload already occurs in 21st-century organizations. The need is clearly for communication as opposed to information, as one respondent explained:

We talk a lot about each other and the work, but we fail to communicate to each other to ensure mutual understanding ... there is no ‘real’ communication ... I don’t think we understand each other ...

Team members want to be acknowledged, understood and communicated with; individuals seek a social identity. Emails are not a preferred way of communication for team performance, as the intent of the message is often lost, due to cultural misinterpretations. Lagerström and Andersson (2003: 86–7) maintain that real communication in multicultural teams is often difficult to attain due to factors such as cultural and language barriers, divergent backgrounds and the knowledge and values of individual actors. García and Cañado (2005) also demonstrate the importance of language and communication in multicultural context.



### *Work harder and smarter, but also maintain a work–life balance*

Smith (2007: 105) jokingly comments that leaders ‘need to demonstrate work-life balance (No problem; work is their life!)’. This might be meant to be tongue-in-cheek, but we have found that many leaders tend to believe and live Smith’s quotation. Thus, 21st-century organizations expect teams to be highly successful and, in many cases, to take on greater workloads than before. Quite often vacant positions are not filled immediately, since the expectation is that the team is strong enough to take on the challenge. Targets are often increased without consulting team members, which adds to the expectation that teams should just work harder and smarter in order to reach those goals. Amid this job stress, teams are expected to live a balanced life, be healthy, have energy at all times and be living examples of overall ‘wellness’. Christie (2004: 25) suggests that risks and problems in the workplace can be successfully addressed through employee assistance programmes, as well as multi-professional support teams. He views this as the organization’s way of maintaining human resources by addressing both the physical and mental needs of teams. One respondent commented on wellness and work:

I sometimes feel like staying home and play sick ... I cannot deal with the pressure at work, having to do so many things ... we do not have people to do the work ... Well, we have people but they do not work.

### *Have fun while delivering results*

Many organizations still believe that fun and business results are two opposite ends on a business continuum. However, employees expressed a strong need to feel that their work is fun and that they are allowed to enjoy it. In his study of Enterprise, an American car rental company, Kazanjian (2007: 204) points out that one of the secrets to Enterprise’s success is the fact that a culture has been created where individuals and teams can have fun. He notes that this sense of enjoyment spills over to the client and ‘builds camaraderie and strengthens individuals’ ability to effectively work together as members of a unified team’. Responses related to this paradox include the following:

Fun has disappeared from work ... we just work ... you cannot tell a joke anymore or just try and have a laugh.

People think you laugh at them ... everybody is so sensitive and see the wrong in everything you try and do ...

All the cultures together is like a bomb ... we do not understand each other’s jokes ... we come from different environments ... we do not value the same things.

How can I tell a ‘male’ joke if there are women around?

Men are too serious and they think women cannot share in the fun ... maybe they try to respect us, but I do not know? ... Now we all keep quiet.

### *Relationship building whilst delivering results*

Dutton (2003: 8) argues that good relations in organizations are crucial in that

... high quality connections are marked by mutual positive regard, trust and active engagement on both sides. Corrosive connections, on the other hand, make it more difficult for employees to do their work ... low-quality connections cause distractions that make it difficult for people to engage fully in their tasks.

Even though relationships are important, it takes time, and, in many cases, money, to build them, especially where special team interventions are involved. Leaders seem to expect teams to operate optimally, without allowing for any special 'team time'. They pacify teams with 'an annual team-building if the budget allows it' and hope that mutual respect and collaboration will follow automatically, as is stated by respondents:

How can you trust and respect someone if you do not know the person ... in this country we have so many skew pictures of people and cultures in our minds.

We do not spend time to learn from each other and what we like and dislike ... there is no time to make small talk ... we have to produce the goods.

You do not build a relationship overnight, but I think it is very important to understand each other in the workplace to perform better.

Trust is mentioned as an important factor in team conflict resolution and the criticality of trust in intragroup conflict management, especially in management teams, has been re-emphasized by Simons and Peterson (2000: 109).

### *We implement team activities, but fail to create a team culture*

When interviewees were asked why they work in teams, more than once the answer was 'because that is the way we are structured and it is expected of us'. Only three respondents admitted to ever experiencing synergy in a team. Most team members interviewed had never actually fully accepted teamwork, and in many cases, they merely shared information when it is needed. Nadler (1992) calls this 'synthetic teamwork', and in the current study it was found that especially the 'specialist' groups, such as management teams and project teams, tended to act as synthetic groups rather than as teams. In many cases, groups of specialists expressed a level of superiority, and used their focused skills as an excuse for not being part of the team. In the current South African environment there is a tendency for people to move between jobs more frequently – as one interviewee pointed out: 'How can we build the team if people do not stay in the team?'

It seems as if 21st-century organizations are often so fixated on becoming team-based organizations that they do not define teamwork or consider what it means in their environment. Katzenbach and Smith (2001: 43) note that, in contemporary organizations, 'change initiatives (often) stress the number of teams created as the measure for success – more is better'. This leads to the implementation of teams and teamwork without a clear link to strategic goals and organizational challenges.

### *We say we embrace change, but we do not comprehend 'flux'*

Organizations do not realize that a multitude of behavioural and other changes must occur for teams to succeed. Many 21st-century companies seem to implement change programmes and have continuous innovation as part of their vision statements. However, change is often not fully understood. *Flux*, according to Steger et al. (2007: 5) is 'change that has a changing nature'. Today's solutions for business problems may be outdated tomorrow and change can occur in all directions at once, and at 'faster and faster rates'.

Teams are faced with growing diversity where nothing is stable anymore. 'The future is no longer the prolongation of the past – industry breakpoints that fundamentally alter the value proposition in industries occur more rapidly' (Steger et al., 2007: 6). Management in contemporary organizations need to empower themselves more in order to facilitate this flux and guide individuals and teams through these ever-changing times.

The uncertainty that comes with change, and more specifically with the economic downsizing activities that are happening in South Africa, also creates uncertainty in the team, as to 'what is going to happen to us and who is going to be kept and who has to leave'. The underlying cultural assumptions that have not been dealt with in the team then come to the fore, as expressed by one respondent:

Change is good if it is fair, but fairness is not observed in an unequal society ... what is fair to me is not fair to someone else ... this brings a lot of tension and creates negative conflict in our workplaces.

## Conclusion and recommendations

### *Managing the cross-cultural conflicts in teamwork paradoxes*

Conflict management refers to behaviours team members employ to deal with their real and perceived differences, some relating to emotionally driven conflicts (relationship conflicts) while others address the more substantive elements of discord (task conflicts). As gathered from the interviewees and literature, it is a mammoth task to manage the conflict constructively if relationships have already deteriorated to the point of distrust. To manage the teamwork paradoxes and subsequent cross-cultural conflict situations, the following steps, very similar to those described by Govindarajan and Gupta (2001) were mentioned.

*The first step* is a recognition of the need for teamwork and the team contract, where it is important to set up clear and explicit objectives so that each member knows the target of the project/work and each one's role and responsibility within this project/work. Clarify any possible misunderstandings regarding the content and process, as well as any cultural assumptions, to ensure that every member aims for the same output. However, as stated by Booysen and Nkomo (2007), 'The question remains as to how South Africans can un-think old categories of citizenship and redefine themselves as a nation, in order to move beyond racial categorization and their own political bondage', which is also relevant in establishing a multicultural team with shared goals and norms.

*The second step* towards managing cross cultural conflict and paradoxes in multicultural teams is to select team members who fit the required jobs or needs. When doing this, the question of surface and deeper cultural elements is important. The diversity of people is characterized by two perspectives: cognitive issues, the way members of the team reflect and perceive the process and the objectives (content); and behavioural issues regarding cultural elements, such as languages and norms. Ensure that complementary skills, knowledge and attitudes are represented in the team. Select a suitable team leader who is trusted and respected by all groupings and determine if there is a need for an external facilitator or coach.

*The third step* is managing and facilitating the team process. This is about facilitating open and rich communication between the members of the team and building trust and respect. Ensure that cultural intelligence is built and recognize the team progress by openly discussing the team's cross-cultural development towards a team culture.

*The fourth step* is never to become complacent or despondent and to keep on communicating and sharing in the team: what works and what does not work and how we can improve our understanding, acknowledgement and shared responsibility to make multicultural teams work in a complex environment.

The eight multicultural teamwork paradoxes and the resulting cross-cultural conflict areas identified in the study bring a new dimension to cross-cultural teamwork in 21st-century organizations, in that it suggests a 'new' underlying principle of 'multicultural modern teams' and 'teamwork with

multiple identities' that needs to be understood and explored further. In South Africa, the management and advancement of diversity is also driven by legislation in the form of the Employment Equity Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The rise of the emergent Black middle class with diverse demands and tastes and rapidly expanding economic power has further complicated the organizational environment. Organizations operating in these diverse environments have to develop the competencies to manage high degrees of complexity and ambiguity, capabilities that would provide an advantage when operating in different cultures (Du Plessis, 2011).

The biggest challenge is to work out what strategies to employ in order to optimally manage these paradoxes, which are in themselves sources of conflict on multiple levels (the individual, group and organizational levels). Managerial challenges in coping with team paradoxes and the implicated cross-cultural conflicts can be positive if they are confronted rather than denied or avoided (Monat and Lazarus, 1985). As Lewis (2000) argues, denying paradoxes disregards their inherent contradictions, thus encouraging tensions to intensify through cycles that reinforce defensive reactions. The new generation of South Africans might be in a better position to deal with the team paradoxes and utilize the paradoxes as constructive forces to enhance teamwork and manage conflict.

### *Limitations*

The vast amount and complexity of information and literature available on culture, teams, conflict and conflict management in cross-cultural situations is in itself a tremendous challenge. This paper by no means has exhausted the scholarly literature and more research in this regard is vital. This study was undertaken to create new meaning and to reach a deeper understanding of cross-cultural conflict involved in multicultural teamwork paradoxes in the current South African multicultural context, therefore the results should not be generalized.

The findings are not representative of all teams in all organizations, and the identified multicultural teamwork paradoxes are not necessarily typical of all situations, but focus on project and management teams. Further studies in this field are recommended to explore teamwork in 'modern multicultural teams' and cross-cultural conflicts and their management in different multicultural organizational contexts.

### *Contribution*

The contribution of this paper is an expansion of our knowledge base by creating a better understanding of the workings of culture and cross-cultural conflict in today's borderless and complex organizational environment that seeks to deliver results by means of multicultural teams. It challenges our understanding of the team paradoxes underlying people's evolving conceptualizations of individual identity and social identity within a specific context of multiple cultural group situations. The managerial implications for cross-cultural management theory and practice, with specific reference to the complexity of multicultural team-based conflict management and resolution in a defined organizational context, are indicated.

### *Conclusion*

If teamwork paradoxes and the related cross-cultural team conflicts are acknowledged, understood and managed efficiently and effectively, cross-cultural teams can save time, make money and assist organizations in reaching organizational goals. However, improving performance by implementing teams in a multicultural organization calls for more than just setting goals. Real effort must be made to challenge existing individual – and social – identities of team members and leaders as they apply

to the specific context. Consequent cross-cultural or transcultural conflict and team paradoxes within a multicultural team are not easily resolved and can often lead to further conflict resulting in confusion, misunderstanding, embarrassment, insults or a breakdown in relationships. As managers we have to learn how to deal effectively with the challenges we face in dealing with different cultures, both in our personal and work lives, by becoming more culturally intelligent. Further studies in this field are recommended to explore the teamwork paradoxes in 'modern multicultural teams' and cross-cultural conflicts and their management in different multicultural organizational contexts.

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