

## **Communicating with diversities: female employees in the South African platinum-mining industry**

### *ABSTRACT*

The South African government set mining companies the target to have women represent 10% of their workforce by 2009. Although the mining companies support the legislation, the target seems almost unreachable and the process riddled with obstacles. This article aims to investigate - within the context within which diversity relating to gender is managed within the South African platinum-mining industry - the perception of female employees on employer-employee relationships and communication management in a particular mining company. The researchers suggest some interventional steps that can be taken to accommodate female employees in the South African platinum-mining industry.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The South African government has introduced several new measures that will, in the long run, force the South African business sector to become more responsible corporate citizens.

Some of the governmental measures, such as the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (28/2002) and the Broad-Based Socio-Economic Empowerment Charter for the South African Mining Industry - also referred to as the *Mining Charter* (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002) and its related Scorecard (Department of Minerals and Energy, 2002), are predominantly focused on the mining industry, setting out requirements for the compulsory conversion of mining rights. The Act (28/2002) came into effect on 1 May 2004, and mines had until 30 April 2009 to conform to the set targets (Hill, 2007).

One of the stipulations of both the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (28/2002) and the *Mining Charter* (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002) is to promote increased female recruitment and incorporation in the mining industry. Although platinum mines in South Africa have pledged their commitment towards complying with said legislation, managing the challenges of employing women – as a heterogeneous minority-employee group within a diverse organisation and within a male-dominated world with deep-rooted beliefs and practices in respect of women in mining (Keegan, Knievel & Shugg, 2001) – remains a contentious issue.

This article aims to describe the specific challenges of women in the platinum-mining industry in South Africa with regard to organisational communication and employer-employee relationships, by

- providing the theoretical background to this problem by briefly discussing the excellence, relationship management and transformational communication theories.
- contextualising the situation of female employees in the South African mining environment.
- describing the results of a case study of a platinum mine in South Africa,
  - to highlight the demographic differences between female and male employees.
  - to compare the views of female and male employees on their relationship with the organisation, on communication with and to the organisation, and on their views regarding organisational conduct.
- suggesting early interventional steps that can be taken to accommodate female employees in the South African platinum-mining industry.

### **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The excellence, relationship management and transformational communication theories offer some guidance to organisations on the management of diverse employees.

### ***Excellence theory***

The excellence theory posits that organisations that value employee diversity (in terms of gender, age, race, religious beliefs, literacy levels, etc.), exhibit communication excellence qualities and create an organisational culture – not just a programme – which brings employees together to achieve common goals (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995; Slater, Weigand & Zwirlein, 2008). This type of organisation encourages the practice of two-way symmetrical communication in communicating with diverse employees (Ströh, 2007), even though it may imply increased cost (Slater et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the principle of requisite variety implies that there must be as much diversity within the organisation itself as in its physical environment for the organisation to be able to understand the views of external stakeholders and bring new perspectives in strategy formulation (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Slater et al., 2008).

From this theory, Dozier et al. (1995) made various suggestions for including diverse employees in the organisation, such as being sensitive to the challenges minorities face, creating sensitisation programmes, appointing a diversity manager and mentors, and allowing minority pressure groups to form. In their study, Slater et al. (2008) added various further aspects including integrating diversity into business strategy and expecting and preparing for conflict.

### ***Relationship management theory***

Several related studies and paradigms emerged from excellence theory in its original form, including relationship management theory (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 2000; Ledingham, 2003). Ströh (2007) argues that when excellence is applied in communication, it involves a participative organisational culture, through two-way symmetrical communication (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), which creates a relationship that is mutually beneficial to the organisation and their diverse employees (Grunig & Hon, 1999). Organisational behaviour and communication are thus crucial towards forming a relationship with employees.

Grunig and Hon (1999) argue that a relationship comprises the aspects of control mutuality, trust, relational satisfaction, relational commitment, and whether it is an exchange or communal relationship. Of these aspects, trust is seen as crucial to the relationship (Grunig & Haung, 2000). Without trust, it is suggested the organisation will not be able to exist (Vercic & Grunig as cited in Grunig & Haung, 2000) and that “[W]ithout trust, ...employees will not work....”, which will directly impact on productivity and the survival of the organisation (Grunig & Haung, 2000).

Both excellence theory and relationship theory state that employees should be viewed as ranking among the most important stakeholders for any organisation (Grunig, 1992). Employees can be described as reputation makers, both when at work and when they have contact with the communities in which they reside (Hannegan, 2004).

Good relationships with employees could make organisations more effective in that they would prevent costly issues, crises, regulation, litigation, bad publicity, lost productivity, while encouraging higher productiveness from employees (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig & Haung, 2000; Grunig & Hon, 1999).

The Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (2003) concurs, further adding that diversity is especially valuable in exploration, research and equipment design.

### ***Transformational communication theory***

To manage diversity effectively, transformation is needed in the attitudes and behaviours of organisational leaders, in order to embrace the knowledge and experience brought to the organisation by various diverse employees (Verwey & Verwey, 2002; Werner, 2003). It will be expected of these transformational leaders to anticipate and adapt to change, create a vision for the organisation and communicate it to their employees in a compelling way (Verwey & Verwey, 2002; Werner, 2003). Rafferty and Griffin (2004) and Özaralli (2003) argue that the transformational leader should communicate a vision (charisma), be inspirational, provide intellectual stimulation and personal recognition. According to Özaralli (2003), transformational communication should lead to empowerment of the diverse employees.

Most of the principles underlying these particular theories could be described as universal and normative in nature. Although these theories have been tested in South Africa (Steyn, 2000; Steyn & Puth, 2000), they have yet to be applied in the unique context of the South African mining industry and its historical legacy.

## **2. CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN IN PLATINUM-MINING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### ***The number of women working in the platinum-mining industry***

One of the requirements in the *Mining Charter* (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002) stipulates that women should constitute 10% of employees in all mining organisations in South Africa by 2009. This target and the wording in the *Mining Charter* are however not very clear and may further imply that this is just a starting point and not the final goal (Reichardt as cited in Campbell, 2007).

Furthermore, the Mining Charter does not define female “participation” very clearly. The suggestion is that participation refers to “...women employed in technical positions and in the productive workforce” (Reichardt as cited in Campbell, 2007). Platinum producers however report an overall percentage of women employed and are not required to report the number of women in technical positions vs other positions.

The problem however is that most mining organisations have not achieved the suggested female employee target. Ranchod (2001) reported that, in 2000, on average only 2.3% of mine employees in South Africa were female and that most of these women were employed in white-

collar positions at corporate offices (Musvoto, 2001; Ranchod, 2001). In 2007, the CSMI reported that women made up less than 5% of the formal mining sector's workforce (CSMI, 2007).

In 2004, Lonmin (Lonmin, 2004) was reported to have 2.5% and Impala Platinum (Campbell, 2007) only 2.6% female employees. From 2004 this number escalated to 4% for Lonmin Platinum in 2006 (Lonmin, 2006), and 5.6% for Implala Platinum in 2007 (Campbell, 2007). Interestingly, Anglo Platinum (Anglo Platinum, 2007) reported in 2006 that 9.1% of their employees were female – a feat that no other mine has been able to replicate.

With regard to female representation in mining, South Africa is as yet sadly lagging behind in the employment of women in mining. For example, Australians, in as long ago as 2001, were outraged to find that “just 11%” of their mining workforce was female (Pattenden as cited in Keegan et al., 2001).

### ***Issues surrounding the employment of women in the platinum-mining industry***

South African mining organisations in general have to cope with various internal and external forces of change.

### ***External forces influencing women in the platinum-mining industry***

The issue of women in mining is brought to the fore by various forces external to the mining organisations themselves.

The first such force is the global move toward human rights, which causes mining organisations to face increased industrial action if they are perceived and experienced not to deal with human rights issues adequately. One such human right is then to have women work in all fields, including the platinum-mining industry.

Secondly, the publication of the King II Report (King Report, 2002) in South Africa put pressure on mining organisations in that it urges organisations to report on corporate accountability, which includes creating a healthy and suitable working environment for *all* employees.

Thirdly, as already mentioned, the South African government has introduced several new measures such as the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (28/2002) and the *Mining Charter* (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002) imposing strict transformation targets on mining organisations. This includes increased emphasis on and added requirements with regard to corporate social performance, black economic empowerment and women-in-mining. This implies that many South African organisations are realising that they need to embrace diversity, they are in the midst of a process of transformation, and moreover realising that diversity management is more than simply managing numbers or targets, or a moral obligation or a mere trick to gain competitive advantage. To manage diversity effectively, transformation is needed in the attitudes and behaviours of organisational leaders in order to embrace the knowledge and

experience brought to the organisation by various diverse employees (Verwey & Verwey, 2002; Werner, 2003).

Lastly, the historical baggage and resulting negative mining legacy that the mining industry carries with regard to previous laws prohibiting women from participating in mining or underground work and a male-dominated work culture left a legacy of a predominantly male environment. The mainly white male top managers battle to incorporate and understand the needs of diverse employees. This industry furthermore has never been gender sensitive and it simply left female employees to fend for themselves (Musvoto, 2001). Due to this mixture of historical and cultural factors (Anglo Platinum, 2003) few South African women therefore select mining as a career.

### ***Internal forces influencing women in the platinum-mining industry***

In addition to the above external forces, various internal forces within the organisations also plague the South African platinum-mining industry in respect of the inclusion of women.

### ***The number of available jobs in the platinum-mining industry***

The limited number of jobs opening up within mining organisations restricts the process of including women in the mining industry, thereby skewing the organisation's gender demographics (Ranchod, 2001). When suitable female candidates are indeed hired, retaining them also becomes a problem as they are lured to jobs filled with more promise (Campbell, 2007).

### ***The specific needs of women in the platinum-mining industry***

Women have specific needs in the working environment that differ markedly from those of males. Two such specific needs are for female facilities underground and women's reproductive roles be taken into account (Reichardt as cited in Campbell, 2007; Ranchod, 2001).

### ***Diversity in the platinum-mining workforce***

Diversity leads to an industry that suffers from the symptoms of industrial action due to the ills within. Diversity has many facets, some of which will be highlighted:

#### ***Origin***

Mine employees migrate from both beyond South Africa and from various provinces within South Africa to find work at one of the many mines in North West and Limpopo provinces. This brings with it a wealth of problems in terms of a conglomerate of different cultures and languages in one workplace and within society at large, disrupted family structures, HIV and Aids, varying expectations in respect of communication and accepted communication styles, and divergent views on the role of women in the workplace and also in the community.

#### ***Gender***

Stereotyping and the role of women within the cultural setting to a large extent dictate the role women play in the workplace and in the community. Culturally, the position of women is seen as

that of being there to support a husband or partner who is the breadwinner (Musvoto, 2001). In general, women are also less mobile than men because of their reproductive activities (Ranchod, 2001). The distribution of women in mining jobs furthermore seems to follow a stereotypical pattern of confining women to “women’s work” (office work), with very few women being employed to do underground work (Musvoto, 2001; Ranchod, 2001).

#### *Language*

Because employees originate from various areas and proficiency in English as the predominant business language is lacking, the mining industry is forced to deal with a myriad of different languages. Some African cultures also use vivid descriptions and examples in their communication to explain words and concepts. Thus, direct business-like language use is easily perceived to be abrupt and rude. In some cultures it is also not acceptable to answer “no” to a question. Thus “yes” is used, while the inclination and body language of the person must be taken into account to determine the actual response.

#### *Literacy*

In South Africa, 50% of people over 20 have fewer than nine years of schooling and 15% never had any schooling (Rule as cited in Thatcher, Shaik & Zimmerman, 2005). Semi-literate and illiterate people lack basic numeric, technological, business and English language skills, and literate people lack English language literacy. Thus blue-collar workers often *seem* to be illiterate, while they might actually be literate, but not fluent in the dominant business language.

Managers who are fluent in English are also not required to learn any other vernacular language that might be the dominant language of the blue-collar workers at a mining operation.

Mining organisations’ communication should therefore comprise adding at least a third language to their communication efforts, and using methods that do not require reading literacy.

#### *Sources of information*

Diverse employees select to obtain information from different sources. One of the most important sources of information to many employees is an immediate supervisor (Bartoo & Sias, 2004). However there are so many sensitive issues in the mining industry - diversity, equal employment and disciplinary action, to name but a few - that management often fears communication with employees, which in turn, leads to employees to being deprived of essential information (Bartoo & Sias, 2004).

This situation, combined with Schumann’s (2004) findings that only half of the employees believe information received from their employers, indicates a very fragile relationship between a mining organisation and its employees. In such relationships, information on deep-rooted cultural beliefs about women in mining, would neither flow easily nor be easily accepted.

Mining employees tend to turn to other sources for their information, such as representatives of organised labour, i.e. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), Solidarity or the United Association of South Africa (UASA).

#### *Union membership*

A very small percentage of economically active women are members of trade unions, which leads to a situation where a very small percentage of the trade union members are female – NUM estimate their female constituents in 2001 to be only 2% of their members (Ranchod, 2001). Unions have not recently reported on the growth of female membership.

The trade unions, in turn, cannot challenge issues specifically pertaining to such small numbers of their members, in that it might upset the majority of their male members.

#### *Relationship and communication problems*

Lastly, one should also bear in mind that the mining industry is plagued with both employee-employer relationship and communication problems, specifically those pertaining to issues such as internal communication, organisational transformation, labour relations/dispute management, human rights issues and fair treatment.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

As part of a comprehensive stakeholder-perception survey, a communication audit and relationship assessment with employees was conducted for one of the world's biggest platinum producers based in North West Province, South Africa.

A total of 77 women (17% of the organisation's female employees) were included in the study by means of two separate questionnaire surveys that overlapped for some questionnaire items, i.e. demographic variables and relationship variables. This means that the female sample size for some of the survey items was 77, and for other items the sample size was 34. The total male sample size for the same reason sometimes was 955, while for some items it was 508. The quantitative data was supplemented by separate focus groups with male and female employees.

The most important measurement instruments used for the communication audit and relationship assessment included adapted versions of the following scales:

- Grunig and Hon's relationship measurement scale (Grunig & Hon, 1999), which was specifically used to measure the relationship attributes, including trust.
- Francis and Woodcock's measurement scale for communication effectiveness (Francis & Woodcock, 1994a; 1994b; 1994c), which included upward and downward communication flow.
- The International Communication Association (ICA) communication audit questionnaire (Hargie & Tourish, 2000), which included questions on sources of information, information sent and organisational behaviour.

Because most mineworkers were illiterate or semi-literate, the measurement instruments had to be adapted quite extensively (Le Roux, 2005. Please also refer to Le Roux (2008) for a chapter explaining the details of how the questionnaire was adapted.).



The responses of male and female employees were compared, and research results are here reported selectively for those questionnaire items showing the most significant differences between men and women. The three different measurement instruments, although adapted for the study, are therefore neither reported on in their totality, nor according to the results obtained per construct.

**4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The demographic findings will be discussed, before subsequently turning to female employees' views of the employer-employee relationships, communication flow within the organisation and organisational behaviour.

**Demographics**

In contrast with the male sample, 49% (n=37) of women had worked for the organisation for between one and five years, with a considerable percentage having been employed by the organisation for less than one year. Likewise, almost 30% (n=21) of the women had been in their current positions for less than one year, while 50% (n=38) had held their current position for between one and five years. This indicates either a high turnover rate for female employees, or that the South African government's gender equity requirements are beginning to take effect.

As could be expected, the female employees were not as yet fully integrated into the core of mining activities. While 83% of the male employees (n=808) worked underground, only 8% (n=6) of the female respondents worked underground. Most of the female employees (79%; n=60) indicated that they worked on the surface.

When studying job levels and qualifications, it became clear that female employees were employed in different capacities than their male counterparts. Compared with male employees, female employees occupied more senior positions, except at the top management level, where all respondents in the sample were men (see Table 1).

	Employee (%)	Supervisor (%)	Middle Management (%)	n-value
Male respondents	70	24	4	933
Female respondents	45	49	6	73

**Table 1: Job level of employees**

Qualifications also differed significantly between male and female respondents. Only 12% of female respondents (n=9) had not completed their secondary education, whereas 45% (n=431) of the male respondents had done so. With regard to tertiary education, 44% (n=33) of the female respondents indicated that they had completed tertiary education, compared with only 11% (n=105) of the male respondents.

On a socio-economic level, it seems that female employees were better off than male employees, probably as a result of being better qualified and consequently employed in higher job levels than most of the men. Around 89% (n=64) of the female employees lived either in rented houses, mine houses or their own houses, compared with 41% (n=382) of the male respondents.

Judging by the above characteristics of the female respondents, one might have assumed that these were privileged white employees. This was however not the case. The female sample consisted of 55% (n=42) black, 5% (n=4) coloured and 40% (n=31) white respondents. This distribution also differed markedly from the male sample, where 87% (n=828) were black employees. When race was and qualifications were, there were no significant differences between black females and white females.

After studying the demographic variables, the conclusion can be reached that compared with the male respondents, the female respondents showed a vastly different distribution in all the demographic variables. It can also be concluded that female employees were probably mostly recruited from beyond the immediate geographical area in which the mining organisation operated, (i.e. from universities).

### ***Employer-employee relationships***

Several relationship-related questions pointed towards differences in male and female employees' perceptions. Contrary to expectations, female respondents were generally *more positive* about their relationship with the organisation than were male respondents.

From Table 2 it would appear that female respondents evaluated their relationship with the organisation more positively than did male respondents – both when they first joined the organisation, and also at the time of the study. The female employees' positive evaluation of employer-employee relationships was surprising when these are compared with their views on gender equality and equal treatment in the organisation (see "Perceptions of organisational conduct").

	Very poor (%)	Quite poor (%)	Quite good (%)	Very good (%)	n-value
How would you rate your relationship with the company WHEN YOU JOINED?					
Male respondents	28	13	30	29	955
Female respondents	16	5	48	31	77
How would you rate your CURRENT relationship with the company?					
Male respondents	28	18	30	24	918
Female respondents	12	10	49	29	73

**Table 2: General rating of employer-employee relationship**

Some of the more detailed relationship items in the survey confirmed the gender differences on the employees' view of the employer-employee relationship (see Table 3). Compared with the male respondents, significantly more of the female respondents stated that the organisation treated them fairly and justly, that the organisation was concerned about their welfare, and that they were happy with the organisation.

With regard to the statement "This company really listens to what I have to say", there were more agreement between men and women, although their views were not equally strong. This possibly pointed towards a communication flow problem (see "Communication flow"), rather than a relationship problem.

	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)	n-value
<hr/>					
This company treats me fairly and justly.					
Male respondents	34	22	31	13	944
Female respondents	13	27	48	12	75
<hr/>					
This company really listens to what I have to say.					
Male respondents	39	25	26	10	933
Female respondents	16	41	39	4	70
<hr/>					
I am happy with this company.					
Male respondents	24	20	36	20	921
Female respondents	16	18	58	8	76
<hr/>					
This company is very concerned about my welfare.					
Male respondents	36	22	29	13	918
Female respondents	18	23	56	3	73

**Table 3: More detailed relationship items**

Trust is one of the key elements in employer-employee relationships (see Table 4). In general, female respondents had more moderate opinions about trusting different groups in the organisation than did the male respondents. However, both male and female respondents generally trusted their immediate fellow employees and supervisors. Female respondents reported a much higher level of trust in top or senior management and in the Human Resources Department, than did the male respondents.

	Always (%)	Often (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)	n-value
How much do you TRUST each of the following in terms of working together?					
• Immediate colleagues					
Male respondents	59	20	9	12	496
Female respondents	34	31	19	16	32
• Team leaders					
Male respondents	40	26	17	17	482
Female respondents	19	32	26	23	31
• Supervisors (e.g. shift boss, driver, clerk)					
Male respondents	34	26	16	24	482
Female respondents	31	28	22	19	32
• Middle management (e.g. surveyor, mine overseer)					
Male respondents	23	23	14	40	481
Female respondents	28	25	25	22	32
• Senior and top management (e.g. general manager)					
Male respondents	21	21	15	43	488
Female respondents	28	31	16	25	32
• Training department					
Male respondents	49	23	13	15	486
Female respondents	33	29	19	19	31
• Human Resources Department					
Male respondents	27	19	17	37	481
Female respondents	22	31	25	22	32

**Table 4: Trust**

With regard to relationship issues, it was therefore found that female respondents did not have as strong opinions as their male colleagues, and experienced the relationship with their employer more positively than did the male respondents.

**Communication flow**

Further differences between male and female respondents were found with regard to how they experienced communication flow within the organisation.

On the issue pertaining to how frequently management collected information on the thoughts and feelings of the workforce (Table 5), male respondents had stronger and more negative views than the female respondents. This implies that female respondents were more often consulted about their thoughts and feelings.

	Never true (%)	Sometimes true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Always true (%)	n-value
% Male respondents	44	28	15	13	501
% Female respondents	27	38	24	12	34

**Table 5: Management frequently collects information on the thoughts and feelings of the workforce**

With regard to information received, male and female respondents were in agreement that there was seldom or never enough information on performance appraisal systems/promotional opportunities and career development opportunities (see Table 6).

On the matter of how their jobs contributed to the organisation’s goals, female respondents mostly said that they never or seldom got enough information, whereas the male respondents’ views were more widely distributed among the different response options.

Female respondents were significantly more satisfied with the amount of information received on health issues than were the male respondents. It seems as if the organisation takes specific care to communicate health issues to its female employees.

On social issues, male and female respondents did not differ significantly, though the female respondents’ views were more moderate than those of the male respondents, with a slight majority of both groups indicating that they were seldom or never given enough information. The same trend occurred regarding information received on the organisation’s handling of human rights issues.

	Never enough (%)	Seldom enough (%)	Mostly enough (%)	Always enough (%)	n-value
• Performance appraisal systems/promotional opportunities					
Male respondents	45	24	18	13	485
Female respondents	41	29	15	15	34
• Pay, benefits of employment, conditions of employment					
Male respondents	43	21	20	16	493
Female respondents	24	21	46	9	33
• Career development opportunities					
Male respondents	37	24	20	19	489
Female respondents	27	34	21	18	33
• How my job contributes to the company's goals					
Male respondents	37	16	19	28	478
Female respondents	29	27	29	15	34
• Health issues					
Male respondents	30	19	25	26	491
Female respondents	10	13	48	29	31
• Social issues					
Male respondents	33	23	25	19	477
Female respondents	21	35	26	18	34
• The handling of human rights issues by the organisation					
Male respondents	38	22	20	20	484
Female respondents	33.5	15	33.5	18	33

**Table 6: Amount of information received on the following issues:**

With regard to team leaders and supervisors as sources of information, both female and male respondents were mostly satisfied, with relatively high percentages of male respondents indicating that they received either too much or too little information from this source (see Table 7).

	Too much (%)	Enough (%)	Too little (%)	n-value
• Team leaders				
Male respondents	25	44	31	494
Female respondents	12	59	29	34
• Supervisors (e.g. shift boss, driver, clerk)				
Male respondents	27	38	35	494
Female respondents	16	50	34	32
• Middle management (e.g. surveyor, mine overseer)				
Male respondents	15	37	48	489
Female respondents	12	41	47	34
• Senior and top management (e.g. general manager)				
Male respondents	15	32	53	497
Female respondents	6	39	55	33

**Table 7: Evaluate the amount of information that you are receiving from the following sources**

Communication is not only about receiving information, but also about the opportunity to relay information to different role players in an organisation (see Table 8). In general, high percentages of both male and female respondents felt that they never or seldom had the opportunity to send information on the topics identified. On employment equity issues, a high percentage of female respondents indicated that they never or seldom had the chance to provide feedback. This is an important matter that should be addressed, especially if the organisation realises that women's feedback on employment equity might help to increase the number of women in the organisation towards meeting the employment equity targets for 2009.



	Never (%)	Seldom (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)	n-value
• Reporting my successes and achievements					
Male respondents	44	19	13	25	489
Female respondents	56	16	25	3	32
• Reporting problems in my work/requesting clearer instructions					
Male respondents	22	18	25	35	483
Female respondents	24	31	33	12	33
• Expressing my opinions about my job					
Male respondents	28	18	23	31	483
Female respondents	42	16	32	10	31
• Giving my opinions on the performance of my immediate manager					
Male respondents	38	18	21	23	473
Female respondents	49	18	18	15	33
• Reporting safety irregularities					
Male respondents	15	16	23	46	478
Female respondents	27	21	31	21	33
• Reporting health issues					
Male respondents	19	15	27	39	478
Female respondents	31	16	28	25	32
• Reporting human rights issues					
Male respondents	32	15	25	28	475
Female respondents	37	24	24	15	33
• Reporting employment equity issues					
Male respondents	36	14	21	29	479
Female respondents	52	27	12	9	33

**Table 8: How often do you have the opportunity to *send* information about the following topics**

Although it was earlier found that female respondents are sometimes information-privileged because of the amount of information they receive, it would appear as if they are not always in such a good position to send information, especially when in comparison with the position of male respondents in this regard.

In general, it is important for mining organisations to consult with all their employees, but because the women might have very specific views, needs and/or expectations, special care should be taken to provide women the opportunity to express their opinions and to send information to various role-players in the organisations for which they work.

**Perceptions of organisational conduct or behaviour**

Employer-employee relationships are influenced by the conduct of both the organisation and its employees.

The first specifically behavioural issue addressed by the study was employees’ perceptions or experiences regarding equity and non-discriminatory or fair treatment by the organisation.

From Tables 9 and 10 it seems that male and female respondents agreed that men and women were not treated as equals in the organisation, and also that the organisation’s conduct did not provide for equal treatment of employees, regardless of race, colour, sex or creed. However, women did not have as strong opinions on these matters as did the men. It is interesting that male respondents agreed that their female colleagues were not treated as their equals.

Furthermore, from Table 10 it can be seen that both male and female respondents were quite convinced that the organisation did not treat as equal its employees from different races, colour, sex or creed, thereby implying that the organisation made itself guilty of discriminatory behaviour or practices.

With regard to male workers’ attitude towards female workers, focus-group discussions revealed that male workers believed that for every woman who descended a shaft, a dead man would ascend from the shaft. Men also stated that most underground work was physically strenuous and would be difficult for a female to complete, this putting more pressure on the male team members. In fact, when the topic of female underground workers was raised in male focus groups, participants’ immediate reaction was to laugh out loud, showing their non-acceptance of the idea of women working underground. In terms of transformation and corporate culture change, this behaviour points towards serious issues that should be addressed by mining organisations if they want to retain female employees so as to meet the 2009 *Mining Charter* target (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002).

	Never true (%)	Seldom true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Always true (%)	n-value
% Male respondents	41	15	20	24	497
% Female respondents	27	33	18	21	33

**Table 9: Men and women are treated as equals**

	Never true (%)	Seldom true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Always true (%)	n-value
% Male respondents	54	17	12	17	497
% Female respondents	50	26	12	12	34

**Table 10: Equal treatment, regardless of race, colour, sex or creed**

The accusation of discrimination in the workplace was strengthened by the responses in Tables 11 and 12, where, again, fewer of the female respondents chose the negative extreme of the 4-point scale. It is alarming that more than 70% of all respondents disagreed that the organisation was an *equal-opportunities employer*. It must, however, be borne in mind that these responses do not necessarily reflect on gender issues, and could also be related to, for example, race discrimination.

Another contradiction seems to be the fact that more than 80% of the female respondents had indicated that promotion did not occur on merit, regardless of social origin, yet a high percentage of female respondents rated their relationship with the organisation as being fairly positive (see “Employer-employee relationships”). This phenomenon can probably be interpreted as empathy with other groups experiencing discrimination in the organisation, although the female respondents might not experience discrimination against themselves, as such.

	Never true (%)	Seldom true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Always true (%)	n-value
% Male respondents	48	24	13	15	495
% Female respondents	38	38	15	9	32

**Table 11: This company is an “equal-opportunities employer”**

	Never true (%)	Seldom true (%)	Mostly true (%)	Always true (%)	n-value
% Male respondents	44	22	14	20	498
% Female respondents	34	47	16	3	32

**Table 12: Promotion on merit, regardless of social origins**

Health as an issue usually lies very close to women’s hearts. Although the female respondents might not have felt as strongly as their male colleagues about previous issues, they did feel very strongly about the organisation’s behaviour with regard to HIV and Aids (see Table 13).

During focus-group discussions, it became apparent that female workers and female health care are not always provided for at either the mining organisation’s own clinics or the mine hospital. Female employees explained that they did not have the necessary privacy and had to explain their medical problems and undress in the presence of male patients. This made female employees feel extremely uncomfortable, and they experienced their treatment as lacking human dignity.

	Very positive (%)	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Very negative (%)	n-value
• HIV and Aids					
Male respondents	35	32	14	19	496
Female respondents	70	15	9	6	33
• Career development & planning					
Male respondents	27	33	23	17	489
Female respondents	19	41	25	15	32
• Affirmative action					
Male respondents	19	29	27	25	477
Female respondents	18	43	30	9	33
• Transformation					
Male respondents	16	33	24	27	487
Female respondents	16	55	26	3	31

**Table 13: Evaluate the company’s behaviour with regard to**

Male respondents were not satisfied with the actions taken by middle management or senior/top management or the Human Resources Department, whereas the majority of the female respondents rated the actions of these groupings as being either *always* or *sometimes satisfactory* (Table 14).

	Always satisfactory (%)	Sometimes satisfactory (%)	Rarely satisfactory (%)	Never satisfactory (%)	n-value
If you did report a problem or send some information, how would you describe the ACTION TAKEN by the relevant people/departments?					
• Immediate colleagues					
Male respondents	44	31	9	16	488
Female respondents	28	47	12.5	12.5	32
• Team leaders					
Male respondents	35	32	15	18	474
Female respondents	15	47	16	22	32
• Supervisors					
Male respondents	33	28	16	23	467
Female respondents	26	39	22	13	31
• Middle management					
Male respondents	21	27	17	35	470
Female respondents	13.5	53	13.5	20	30
• Senior/top management					
Male respondents	18	23	21	38	471
Female respondents	16	36	19	29	31
• HR Department					
Male respondents	24	26	18	32	469
Female respondents	19	52	13	16	31

**Table 14: Action taken on information sent**

The demographic differences between male and female respondents earlier discussed (see “Demographics”) could be a contributing factor to these findings, because male and female respondents did not find themselves on the same job levels within the organisation.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Taking the above findings into consideration, the following implications came to the fore:

- Specifically female employees in platinum-mining organisations must be identified and consulted as a separate, heterogeneous and equal stakeholder in the organisation (see Musvoto, 2001).
- There are expectations from the communities around the mines that, because of the diversity targets, females should get more job opportunities. However, female community members have as yet not gained the benefits of employment by the mining organisations.
- Women, overall, viewed their own relationship with the organisation in a more positive light than did their male counterparts. This supports the findings by Dinsbach, Feij and De Vries (2007) that minorities bring lower expectations to their job and therefore record higher satisfaction levels. This does not however indicate that the status quo is acceptable. Improvements in the employer-employee relationship will be crucial towards both recruiting and then retaining female employees.
- More opportunities should be created for female employees to provide feedback to the organisation as they might have different views, needs and/or expectations than those of men.
- As no specific communication benchmarks exist for the mining industry in South Africa, the commissioning of the survey by the platinum-mining organisation on which the case study was based can be described as a very bold step in the right direction in that it could contribute to establishing benchmarks and best-practice guidelines for platinum-mining organisations in South Africa.

Possible practical interventional steps can be suggested from this discussion.

## **6. POSSIBLE PRACTICAL INTERVENTIONAL STEPS**

The following are possible practical interventional steps that can be taken:

### *More research on women in mining*

Research on women in mining is lacking (Ranchod, 2001). More knowledge could add to female employees taking their rightful place in the South African platinum-mining industry.

### *Commitment to transformation*

Organisations should be both committed to transformation and to making it part of their organisational strategy. It should not be seen as a one-off drive or programme. Slater et al. (2008) warn organisations that when committing to diversity superficially, the cost might outweigh the benefits.

### *Transformation on all levels*

Employees' and the external stakeholders' frustration with what they perceive as an unwillingness to adhere to transformational and equity requirements as posed by the South African government, and allegations of discriminatory practices should also be addressed.

Not only top management, but all levels of the organisation should understand the importance of transformation for the organisation, and be committed to the process.

In the process of working towards corporate-culture change, specifically male employees, on all organisational levels, should be involved in diversity-training programmes and mentorship (as suggested by Dozier et al., 1995).

#### *The role of managers*

Slater et al. (2008) and Keegan et al. (2001) argue that all line managers should be responsible for managing diversity and change. It should not be a task limited to a human resources department.

Managers should thus recognise their role in influencing the success of the organisation and in improving corporate performance in a variety of dimensions. They should be taught how to lead by example and to be visible as leaders, as well as be good interpersonal and public communicators known to have a passion for diversity. Keegan et al. (2001) argue the need for ongoing diversity training for managers within the Australian mining industry as previously discussed.

#### *Diverse internal communication*

In accordance with mining organisations' corporate communication strategies, attention should be devoted to a more creative and diverse use of communication media for internal communication. The internal communication media used should match the culture, language and the communication expectations of the diverse employee corps. The use of alternative media - such as radio and television/video for internal communication - could be investigated.

#### *Enabling working environment*

More specifically geared towards recruiting and retaining female employees in the mining industry, organisations should take care to create an enabling environment for these employees on all job levels. Female employees should be informed of the specific career-development opportunities available to them, and should not merely be appointed to reach equity targets as set by the South African government.

Special policies for the handling of female employees in the workplace are important, but policies alone would not help to keep the female workforce happy. Employees should understand that reluctance to change and fear of the unknown together create a recipe for the ongoing suffering of women employees in mining organisations (Keegan et al., 2001).

#### *Use the available community resources*

Mining organisations should embark on special early-recruiting programmes within the communities in which they operate in order to recruit and prepare females for recruitment. This could entail the identification of female high school pupils and exposing these pupils to information on the different careers available in the mining industry or even creating a bursary scheme.

It is however important to focus recruitment on the neighbouring communities, as communities' expectations of job opportunities existing at nearby mines are exceptionally high.

#### *Female forums*

In order to address the very specific needs of female employees in mining, special forums could be created to address female-specific issues in the mining environment, where they could get the opportunity to voice their experiences and concerns (as suggested by Dozier et al., 1995).

In short, mining organisations should “keep their fingers on the pulse” of their female employees.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

As Pattenden (as cited in Keegan et al., 2001) and Reichardt (as cited in Campbell, 2007) pointed out, the focus should not be solely on the employment of women, but also on ensuring that the female employees remain within the mining sector and have fulfilling and meaningful careers.

To reach the target of 10% female employees in the mining industry by 2009, will take a collective effort of all the role players, including mining organisations, government, non-governmental organisations and the community. It is the responsibility of each role player to work together with other role players to identify the most successful strategies to increase the female mining workforce.

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