# The impact of organisational culture, unconscious bias and person-organisation fit on employee selection decisions during recruitment

**By**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University.**

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**March 2023**

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Date: March 2023

## Abstract

Many organisations affirm their commitment to organisational diversity; however, efforts to achieve it are often unsuccessful. As the recruitment process is the door through which employees enter an organisation, this process, in some way or another, plays a significant part in making selection decisions that determine the extent to which an organisation is regarded as diverse. Furthermore, limited research has focused on how selection-decisions are made in practice and what influences selection decision-making. The area of recruitment is subsequently identified as the focus for this study. Three concepts are identified as possible contributors to the lack of success of organisational diversity strategies: organisational culture, unconscious bias, and person-organisation fit (PO-fit). These three concepts are considered, in the recruitment selection decision-making process, through the lens of complexity thinking, to explore the possible dynamics that might contribute to the lack of success of diversity strategies. The findings of this study suggest that unconscious bias, through the workings of PO-fit, problematically influences recruitment selection decisions, thus leading to discrimination as an ethical risk. Due to the reflexive and non-linear nature of organisational dynamics, predictive outcomes of interrelations cannot be established, and therefore, the reflexive and non-linear interplay of the parts, rather than the parts themselves are the object of inquiry. Several strategies to mitigate the identified risks are presented. One such strategy is a concept developed by the researcher, namely PO-add which is based on the principles of inclusion and promoting difference in recruitment decision-making. The ethics of complexity is presented as a theoretical framework that provides guidance when ethical decision-making is the objective. This perspective requires a very specific position from decision-makers, namely, the provisional imperative. To show how the ethics of complexity could facilitate these aims, two processes supporting the provisional imperative of complexity theory are investigated: imagination and provisionality. These two processes are considered through the application of various strategies towards mitigating the risks arising at the intersection of PO-fit, organisational culture and unconscious bias.

# Opsomming

Verskeie maatskappye beweer dat hulle verbind is tot diversiteit, maar dikwels is maatskappye se pogings om diversiteit te bevorder onsuksesvol. Personeelwerwing is die deur waardeur werknemers die organisasie betreë, daarom is hierdie proses – op welke manier ookal – sentraal tot werwingsbesluite wat ‘n impak het op die diversiteit van ‘n maatskappy. Tot op hede is daar beperkte navorsing gedoen oor hoe werwingsbesluite in werklikheid geneem word en wat hierdie besluite kan beïnvloed. Drie konsepte, naamlik, maatskappykultuur, onbewuste vooroordeel en persoon-maatskappy-passing (PM-passing) word geïdentifiseer wat moontlik kan bydra tot die gebrek aan sukses van diversiteitstrategieë. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie suggereer dat onbewuste vooroordeel, deur die werkinge van PM-passing, ‘n problematiese invloed het op werwingsbesluite en lei tot die etiese risiko van diskriminasie. Vanweë die refleksiewe en nie-lineêre aard van maatskappy-dinamika, kan uitkomste nie voorspel word nie en interverwantskappe nie bevestig word nie. Daarom is die reflektiewe en nie-lineêre interverwantskap van die konsepte die fokus van hierdie studie eerder as die individuele konsepte hulself. Verskeie strategieë om die risiko van hierdie interverwantskappe teë te werk word bespreek, onder andere, PM-toevoeging, ‘n konsep wat deur die navorser ontwikkel is en wat gegrond is op die beginsels van insluiting en die bevordering van andersheid in werwingsbesluitneming. Die etiek van kompleksiteit word aangebied as ‘n teoretiese raamwerk wat leiding bied wanneer etiese besluitneming die oogmerk is. Hierdie benadering vereis besluitnemers om ‘n baie spesifieke posisie in te neem, naamlik die posisie van noodsaaklike voorlopigheid. Om aan te dui hoe die etiek van kompleksiteit behulpsaam kan wees in etiese besluitneming, word prosesse wat ondersteunend is tot die posisie van noodsaaklike voorlopigheid ondersoek, naamlik: verbeelding en voorlopigheid. Deur die toepassing van verskeie strategieë by die interseksie van PM-passing, word maatskappykultuur en onbewuste vooroordeel ondersoek om die risiko wat onstaan, teë te werk.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Julio, my supervisor, for your support, guidance, patience and your in-depth involvement with my thesis.

To my wonderful coach, who continually encouraged and guided me.

To my mom, who has always encouraged me to continue learning and asks everyday as to my progress and that giving up is not an option.

To my family who are my biggest supporters. Thank you for believing in me, your unwavering support and encouragement initiated the start of this journey, support through the journey, and the reward of the journey, all of this would not have been possible without you, Michael, Andi and Shane.

This is for all those who feel that they ‘don’t fit’ … your individuality, authenticity and values speaks louder.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background to the study

Organisations are inherently complex systems. Complexity in its simplest form refers to “things that lack simple explanations” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:447). Whilst organisations are inherently complex, the current global business environment – characterised by trends such as digitisation, automation, and globalisation (Möller, Nenonen & Storbacka, 2020) – adds another dimension of complexity to the organisational context. Many organisations struggle to adapt and respond to today’s global business environment (Brauns, 2013).

Both academic and non-academic business literature abounds with studies and opinion pieces on how organisations should position themselves within an increasingly complex business environment to remain relevant and competitive. In the context of globalisation and associated changes in terms of diverse and cross-cultural workforces, the need for organisational diversity and cultural awareness has received significant emphasis. However, it remains challenging for organisations to implement organisational diversity strategies successfully and to establish inclusive environments.

Based on existing research, many organisations state that they are committed to diversifying their workforce, but very often these strategies are unsuccessful (Pless & Maak, 2004; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017). According to Green et al., (2018:2), many organisations agree on the need for diversity and inclusion in organisations, yet “the pace of progress towards realising equality of opportunity is still painfully slow”; furthermore, many organisations implement diversity strategies but do not achieve the results they are seeking (Hocking, 2017; Pless & Maak, 2004; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017).

According to Pless and Maak (2004), the failure of an organisation’s diversity management strategy is because the strategic approach to diversity relating to cultural norms and values has not received the same attention as its relation to

policies, systems and processes. The same authors argue that diversity is firstly a cultural concept and “thus a question of norms, values, beliefs and expectations”, and more attention should be paid to organisational culture as “a culture of inclusion [that] has to be built on solid moral grounds” (Pless & Maak, 2004:129-130).

The impetus for the current study, in broad terms, was the researcher’s interest in deepening understanding of what is potentially impacting organisational diversity strategies of organisational culture. During the preliminary literature review, three concepts were identified as possibly contributing to the lack of success of organisational diversity strategies: organisational culture, unconscious bias, and person-organisation fit (PO-fit). The following section presents the motivation for selecting these three concepts for further investigation in this study.

## Motivation for the study

The question underlying the statement of Pless and Maak (2004:129) – namely that diversity is a cultural concept and “thus a question of norms, values, beliefs, and expectations” is: What role does the complexities and dynamics of organisational culture play in the success or lack thereof in the implementation of organisational diversity strategies? In an organisational context, organisational culture is fundamental in understanding what goes on in organisations, how organisational culture is shaped and how to improve (Schein, 1992). In other words, organisational culture is a product of diversity factors dominant in a particular organisation. Then, the recruitment process is the ‘door’ through which employees enter an organisation. Thus, the recruitment process can be regarded as the filter between the organisation and potential employees. The implication is that the recruitment process, in some way or another, plays a significant part in making selection decisions that determine the extent to which diversity is introduced, endorsed and valued in organisations. The area of recruitment was subsequently identified as the focus of this study.

A further question that emerged during the literature review was: What influences selection decisions? Based on the literature, recruiters use various strategies, criteria, tools, and techniques when making selection decisions. One of the criteria

mentioned in the literature that is closely linked to organisational culture is person-organisation fit (PO-fit), which is defined as the extent to which a candidate's values reflect the values of the organisation (Bye et al., 2013).

Whilst considerable research has been done on recruitment selection strategies, tools, and techniques, as well as authenticating selection strategies, substantially less research has focused on recruitment decisions that organisations make during the selection process (Sanchez & Levine, 2012). This suggests that very little is known about how selection decisions are made and what factors influence them, beyond what the selection panels consciously consider (such as knowledge, experience, and skills) in making their selection decisions (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Cappelli, 2019). The observations of Bolander and Sandberg (2013) and Cappelli (2019) gave rise to a third question during the preliminary literature review: What influences recruiters in assessing PO-fit?

Based on the existing literature, PO-fit as a selection approach remains "questionably defined and often misunderstood" (De Cooman et al., 2019:646), and the practice of recruiting for PO-fit has been questioned by various scholars. Most studies indicate that subjective measures are used to determine PO-fit (Linos & Reinhard, 2015), that is, it tends to be based on the recruiter's subjective opinion of what constitutes PO-fit (Slaughter & Kausel, 2013; Wallace & Pillans, 2016).

An additional question that arose during the preliminary literature review is why – when an organisation and its recruiters have a clear strategy to become more diverse – would selection decisions not align with the organisational diversity strategy? The answer to this lies, in part, in the third concept that is key in this study, namely, unconscious bias. Unconscious bias is described as social stereotyping, by categorising certain groups of people based on arbitrary criteria (Whysall, 2017). It arises from unconscious mental shortcuts which may result in discriminatory practices. Unconscious bias is involuntary and can influence a recruiter without his/her awareness or intention (Greenwald & Krieger 2006; Jost et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2015; Stanovich, 2016). Unconscious bias is therefore of considerable importance in the context of selection decisions, which ultimately rely on human judgement (Linos & Reinhard 2015; Lee, 2005). Therefore, the influence of

unconscious bias on employees can impair recruitment selection decisions and organisational culture.

## Problem statement

Despite the emphasis placed on the importance of diversity in an organisational context, many organisations fail in the implementation of their diversity strategies. Given the positioning of recruitment, as a filter for selecting employees, the recruitment process – and, more specifically, selection decisions within this process – was identified as the focus area of this study, to explore the possible dynamics that might contribute to the failure of diversity strategies.

Existing research on selection decisions has focused predominantly on the development, testing, and selection of tools to improve the selection process (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Slaughter & Kausel, 2013). However, little research has been done on critically reviewing how selection decisions are made in practice (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013) and what influences decision-making. Thus, a great deal remains unknown about selection decision-making within the recruitment process (Rivera, 2011; Schwartz, 2015) and can result in the making of biased decisions (Greenwald & Banaji, 2017; Toplak, West & Stanovich, 2011).

## Research questions

Following the identified research problem, the research questions that guided this study are:

- What is the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of Human Resource Management (HRM) and employee selection decisions?
- What are the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of employee selection decisions?
- How can these ethical risks be mitigated?

## Aim and approach

Based on the research questions, this theoretical study aims to explore existing literature, the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit, to identify the ethical risks of this intersection, and to consider how these risks can be mitigated.

As organisations are complex systems, complexity thinking was selected as a lens through which the research questions could be considered. Since any complex system, such as an organisation, cannot be known in its full complexity, it requires "an engagement with complexity thinking" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:448). Complexity thinking is an approach derived from complexity theory, which is applied to frame or consider problematic situations and interactions within a complex system (Davis & Simmt, 2006; Davis & Sumara, 2008a, 2008b; Forsman, 2011; Harmat & Herbert, 2020). The value of complexity thinking is that it provides a dynamic framework within which to consider and explore the nature and effects of complex phenomena (Merali & Allen, 2011; Woermann, 2010) and envisage how to accept and advance despite uncertainty (Braithwaite et al., 2017).

## Scope of the study

It is important to note that this study is not concerned with already diverse organisations that value diversity and inclusion and actively promote building a diverse workforce and organisational culture. Instead, this study concerns organisations where diversity is not valued within their culture (although they might profess that it is), and where recruiting for PO-fit has the effect of maintaining the status quo, i.e., perpetuating the lack of diversity in an organisation. This is not to say that hiring for PO-fit in highly diverse companies is not a problem – it simply falls outside the scope of this study.

## Research method

This is a theoretical study. A systematic literature review was conducted, which led to an analysis of key concepts in the literature and an exploration of the interrelation of three such key concepts.

## Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides a brief background to the context of this study. Recruitment and selection in Human Resource Management (HRM)[1] are discussed, with specific reference to the recruitment process and where within the process selection decisions need to be made. Thereafter, a brief overview is provided of various assessment approaches that precede selection decisions. Subsequently the three key constructs of this study – namely organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit – are defined and discussed. Specific attention is given to organisations as complex systems and how the construct of organisational culture is itself a complex system. To clarify what is meant by the complexity of the construct, organisational culture is discussed from a complexity thinking perspective. Following from the discussion of the three key constructs of this study, their intersection is explored.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a discussion of the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit. In this chapter, the focus is ethical risks of PO-fit as a recruitment tool is discussed in terms of the intersection of the three focus areas. Firstly, discrimination is identified as an ethical risk resulting from using PO-fit in selection decision-making. Secondly, it is argued that discrimination against the individual could lead to systemic discrimination in the organisation, due to the aggregating effect within a complex system. This aggregating effect is identified as a lack of organisational diversity, thus influencing organisational culture towards in-groups versus out-groups, thus causing harm to those individuals who are discriminated against, and also risking groupthink and stereotyping out-groups. Thirdly, the motivation behind organisational diversity

[1] HRM is defined as the process of attracting, selecting, motivating, and retaining competent people to achieve organisational goals (Ployhart, 2006).

strategies is considered from three ethical perspectives: utilitarian, deontological, and the ethics of complexity. It is argued that the utilitarian and deontological approaches to ethics are insufficient in dealing with the complexities highlighted in this study. Hence, the ethics of complexity is presented as a theory that provides guidance when ethical decision-making (as it relates to selection decisions) is the objective.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a discussion of practical steps that can be taken to mitigate the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity by suggesting the use of the provisional imperative, which can be understood as a critical position or attitude towards ethical decision-making, of complexity theory. Two of the four mechanisms underlying the provisional imperative (namely imagination and provisionality) are referred to throughout the chapter. This serves to indicate how the ethics of complexity could assist in mitigating the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity. Lastly, the thesis argues that organisations need to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of their organisational diversity strategies and the practical application of the provisional imperative. Supplementary mechanisms are suggested as a possible way in which the business environment can truly transform by enabling diverse and inclusive organisations.

This thesis ends with a short conclusion that summarises the explored research questions and the recommendations made to assist organisations in obtaining a deeper understanding of the ethical underpinning of diversity strategies within complex organisations.

# Chapter 1

## Recruitment selection processes in the context of HRM, and the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit

## Introduction

The recruitment process is significant in that it has far-reaching consequences for other Human Resource Management (HRM) processes such as organisational development, organisational change, and organisational culture, as well as a direct impact on organisational performance. The relationship between organisational performance and recruitment practices is well documented in existing research (Abbasi et al., 2020; Anyango et al., 2018; Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Gatewood, Feild & Barrick, 2008; Goldstein et al., 2017; Hamza et al., 2021; Vickers, McDonald & Grimes, 2015). It is claimed that, for organisations to achieve their aims and objectives, they ought to attract, select and retain people best qualified, and ensure that the right person is appointed in the right position (Acikgoz, 2019; Armstrong, 2009; Gutterman, 2017; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Consequently, effective organisational recruitment practices are of strategic importance and the selection of the right employees will drive the organisational agenda and assist in achieving a competitive advantage.

Despite the importance of selection decisions[2] in realising an organisation's strategic objectives, very little research has been done to understand how recruitment selection decisions are made and what influences these decisions (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013). Since selection decisions, organisational culture, person-organisation fit (PO-fit), and unconscious biases are key concepts in this study, it is necessary to define and clarify these concepts.

This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of recruitment and selection processes in the context of HRM. The recruitment process is outlined to indicate at which point selection decisions are made, and a brief synopsis of assessment approaches is provided. Thereafter, the key concepts organisational culture (Section 1.2),

[2] In this study, "selection decisions" refer to decisions made in the context of recruiting employees to an organisation.

unconscious bias (Section 1.3) and PO-fit (Section 1.4) are introduced, followed by a description of the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in selection decisions (Section 1.5). The chapter concludes with a summary.

## 1.1 Recruitment and selection processes in HRM

HRM involves a series of people (HR practitioners) making judgements, decisions and generating policies and procedures for employees (Soman et al., 2021). While there are many definitions of recruitment and selection, they share common elements such as a "focus on attraction, identification and retention of employees" (Searle, 2009:152). Recruitment and selection in HRM are organisational processes to generate a pool of competent potential employees for possible employment, using specific assessment approaches and key indicators, and selecting candidates[3] based on predefined criteria (Bratton, 2007).

Several scholars and practitioners have dedicated themselves to directing the way highly qualified candidates are selected for jobs (Ployhart, Schmitt & Tippins, 2017; Potočnik et al., 2021). The selection process involves significant irreducible unpredictability; yet, many recruiters seem to believe that all prediction inaccuracies are due to errors in the assessment process. To put it another way, people appear to believe that as long as the potential employee is the right person for the job and is accurately assessed, success is guaranteed. This means that recruiters have the belief that one can become skilled in making intuitive judgments about a potential employee's likelihood of success (Highhouse, 2008). While research recognises the critical role of employee selection (Ployhart, 2006), many recruiters still do not fully understand employee selection processes or how to optimise the required decisions (Ployhart, 2006; Sanchez & Levine, 2012).

Ployhart (2006), and Sanchez and Levine (2012) further state that very few scholarly studies have investigated how selection decisions are made. While considerable research has been done on recruitment selection approaches, tools, and techniques,

[3] In this study, "candidate" and "potential employee" are used interchangeably, referring to a person who applies for a job and has been identified as having potential for that particular job in the organisation.

as well as authenticating selection strategies, substantially less research has focused on selection decisions that organisations make during the selection process (Sanchez & Levine, 2012). As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the factors influencing selection decisions beyond specified job criteria, such as potential employees' knowledge, skills, aptitude, and other characteristics (KSAO)[4] (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Cappelli, 2019; Ployhart, Schmitt & Tippins, 2017).

### 1.1.1 The recruitment process

By selecting the right employees, organisations can increase their capabilities to realise strategic objectives and manage future challenges (Komm et al., 2021). Whilst the recruitment process refers to a broad set of activities that connect candidates to an organisation, "at its core, recruitment is about finding and putting the right person in the right job at the right time and place to enable organisations to implement strategy and create competitive advantage" (Ployhart, Schmitt & Tippins, 2017:293).

Within the recruitment process there are various stages, as indicated in Figure 1:

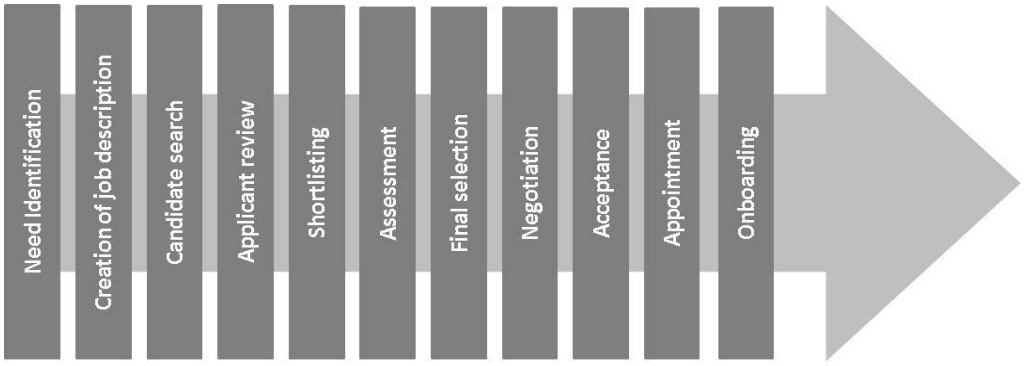


**Figure 1: Stages in the recruitment process**

(Adapted from Markoulli et al., 2017:367-375; Breaugh 2013:390-411 & 2017:12-28)

Recruitment and selection should be differentiated, although they are interrelated in that all recruitment activities result in decisions about employee selection (Slaughter & Kausel, 2013; Whysall, 2017). Recruitment is the broad set of activities in the HRM

[4] Other personal characteristics refer to all other traits that do not fit into the other mentioned categories. For example, other includes preferences, temperament, job-related interests and personality traits, as well as related dispositional attributes that may influence a candidate's performance across a wide range of tasks and may indicate how well a person will respond to work demands (Ployhart et al, 2014).

process of which selection is an element of the recruitment process and refers to the identification of suitable candidates. The assessment approaches are applied to choose the right candidate for a specific position (Davidson, 2011; Ployhart, Schmitt & Tippins, 2017; Searle, 2009). It is the selection stages that are relevant in the context of this study, namely: shortlisting, assessment, and final selection – all of which involve selection decisions[5].

During the shortlisting stage, certain applicants are identified, usually based on their written applications and CVs, to progress to the following stage of the recruitment process. During the assessment stage, applicants are assessed against a set of criteria. This is done using various assessment tools and techniques, depending on the organisation's selection approaches. A brief introduction to assessment approaches is provided below to conceptualise variety, availability and practices.

***Assessment approaches***

A variety of assessment approaches are available, and their accuracy and validity are well-documented in the research literature (Linos & Reinhard, 2015; Slaughter & Kausel, 2013; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Assessment approaches are strategies to assist recruiters in the process of selection, by assessing, shortlisting and making hiring decisions (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). The selection process is characterised by ongoing deliberation involving interrelated discursive processes: identifying and grouping candidates; establishing candidate facts by referring to various information sources; and using a variety of assessment approaches – predominantly, the employment interview, but also various other approaches (Bolander & Sandburg, 2017; Ployhart, Schmitt & Tippins, 2017).

A full review of assessment approaches is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, a brief overview of three dominant approaches to employee assessments during the recruitment and selection process is provided: the psychometric approach (Billsberry & Searle, 2007; Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014); the social process approach (Billsberry, 2007; Billsberry & Searle, 2007; Ryan & Ployhart,

[5] Although selection research considers a broad range of criteria in different cultures and contexts, and an ever-expanding array of practical applications (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014), the focus of this study is specifically the stages of the recruitment process that entail selection decisions.

2014); and the *PO-fit* approach (Billsberry & Searle, 2007; Boon, 2008; Bowen, Ledford & Nathan, 1991; Kristoff-Brown & Billsberry, 2013).

The premises of the psychometric approach are that: (a) each job is associated with specific requirements that can be objectively determined; (b) individuals possess stable attributes, and; (c) the job and the candidate can be measured independently and objectively (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013; Kristof-Brown, Barrick & Franke, 2002; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

The social process approach is primarily concerned with the interpersonal dynamics between candidates and the organisation during the recruitment process (Billsberry & Searle, 2007, Searle, 2009). It aims to establish a "psychological contract between candidate and organisation" (Bolander & Sandberg, 2013:286).

A third approach is the *fit* approach which is divided into two sub-approaches, namely, the person-job (PJ) fit approach and the person-organisation (PO) fit approach. Assessment of PO-fit is the process of establishing whether potential employees share the values of the organisation and are likely to fit (Boon, 2017; Morley, 2007; Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). The PO-fit approach is the focus of this study.

## 1.2 Organisational culture

The concept of "culture" has been studied in a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, and history, but it lacks a definition that applies across these different fields of study (Chatman & Choi, 2019; Kahn, 2014). Organisational culture has many different dimensions, meanings, and interpretations, and is multifaceted and multi-dimensional (Schein, 2017); hence its conceptualisation also lacks a singular definition and is characterised by different points of view (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Cacciattolo, 2014; Da Costa et al., 2018; Filabi & Bulgarella, 2018; Giorgi, Lockwood & Glynn, 2015; Ledimo 2015; Trevino & Nelson, 2011; Weeks, 2010; Westerman & Cyr, 2004).

Park et al., (2021) defines organisational culture as the shared norms and beliefs of an organisation. Kristof-Brown, Jansen and Colbert (2002:985) describe organisational culture as “a set of values that provide unwritten rules of behaviour” for employees. Ross (2008:12) describes organisational culture similarly, elaborating that: “Organisational culture is more or less an enduring collection of basic assumptions and ways of interpreting things that a given organisation has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its internal and external influences.” According to Kuenzi, Mayer and Greenbaum (2019), organisational culture is based upon an organisation’s character which comprises several components; some components are observable, whilst others are based on beliefs, values and underlying assumptions that form the foundation of organisational practices, decisions and behaviours. Ross (2008) indicates that such organisational practices and ensuing norms and patterns of employee behaviour exert significant influence on organisations.

For the purpose of this study, organisational culture is understood as per the definition provided by Kristoff-Brown, Jansen & Colbert (2002:985) due to its clarity without reducing its complexity. This is despite organisations frequently setting and formalising their values into cultural statements, by interpreting internal and external environments, resulting in emergent characteristics (Cilliers, 1998; Lu et al., 2020). In this study, specific attention is given to organisations as complex systems and how the construct of organisational culture is itself a complex system.

Kahn (2014) proposes a generalist view of culture to understand the concept in an organisational context since a generalist approach conceives all aspects of organised life as culture. Kahn (2014) aligns himself with Stapley’s (1996:12) view, that: “(u)nfortunately some people see culture as something an organisation *has*, in other words, something that is imported into an organisation or created and manipulated by management”. Instead, both Stapley and Kahn view organisational culture as “systems of ideas where the actors play a central part in its development” (Kahn 2014:22). Stapley (1996:12) states: “Culture is something an organisation *is*: it emerges from social interactions, as the product of negotiated and shared symbols and meanings”.

Schein (2010:18) defines organisational culture as:

> … a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration[6], which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.

To achieve any meaningful understanding of organisational culture, a great deal more needs to be considered besides its visible manifestations such as an organisational chart, business model, or set of policies. According to Schein (2010), who states that organisational culture exists at different levels in an organisation and includes tangible elements, such as artefacts, and less tangible elements, those elements which are taken for granted. The tangible cultural aspects are written documents such as strategy documents, job descriptions or recruitment policies. Less tangible, however, are an organisation's cultural values, beliefs, and norms, as well as its underlying assumptions, which can be much harder to identify and interpret. Schein (2010) acknowledges that much of organisational culture exists below the surface and yet produces robust impacts on all parts of a system. This is illustrated by Schein's (1992) iceberg model (Figure 2) indicating that some cultural aspects of an organisation are visible, while some are unseen or below the surface.

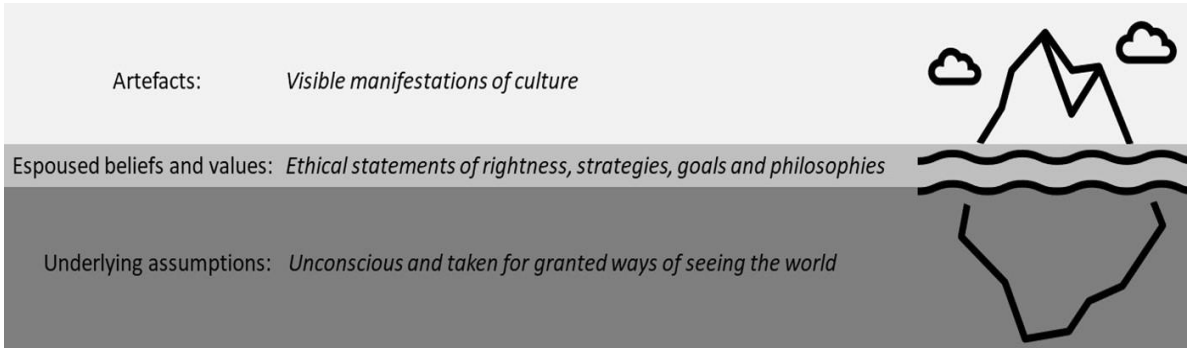


**Figure 2: The iceberg model indicating different levels of organisational culture**

(Adapted from Schein, 2010:23-24 and Trottier, 2022)

[6] Schein (2010) developed two functional concepts of culture formation, namely external adaptation, and internal integration. The first, external adaptation, relates to the challenge of surviving in, and adapting to, the external environment. The second, internal integration is necessary for a group to work together in a sufficiently cohesive and coordinated way, in order to maintain itself into the future. Schein (2017:149) explains that organisational culture is "what a group has learned in solving problems of external adaptation and internal integration".

The three levels identified by Schein (2010:23-24) and indicated in Figure 2, range from visible manifestations to unconscious assumptions which he defines as “the essence of culture”. According to Schein (2010), artefacts on the first level are the visible and tangible manifestations of culture (for example, written documents, the language used in an organisation, and employee behaviour). On the second level, the espoused beliefs and values refer to ethical statements of rightness and include individual organisational members’ ideals, goals, values, aspirations, ideologies, and rationalisations. Schein (2010:23-24) states that these may or may not be congruent with behaviour and other artefacts. On the third level are the underlying assumptions that shape the behaviour, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of employees. Schein (2010:23-24) states that these assumptions are the unconscious and taken-for-granted beliefs that underpin the values held by employees in an organisation.

The culture of an organisation comes into being through conscious and unconscious aspects as a complex organisational system created by employees’ habits, beliefs, values, ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting (Bennett & Bennett, 2008; Cleland & Durning, 2015). Ross (2008:12) states that even though many patterns and norms that underlie organisational culture are unconscious, these “[u]nconscious organisational patterns, or norms of behaviour, exert an enormous influence over organisational decisions, choices, and behaviours”. Due to its abstract nature, the unconscious element of organisational culture is much more difficult to understand and to work with, compared to the conscious nature of organisational culture which is much easier to recognise and observe. The implication is that some of the aspects that contribute to organisational culture are not explicitly known or named, yet they still exert a significant impact on the culture within an organisation.

The abstract nature of organisational culture can be described as “[emerging] from social interactions [and] as the product of negotiated and shared symbols and meanings” (Stapley, 1996:12). Schein (2004:8) also regards culture as “an abstraction” but makes the important point that “[...] although culture is an abstraction, the social forces derived from organisational culture are enormously powerful in influencing behaviour, and failure to understand the workings of these forces can cause harm”. In other words, if discriminatory or other negative beliefs

and values are part of an organisation's culture, these will also influence selection decisions.

The implication is that organisational culture is not only created by its visible appearances but is a complex system consisting of multitudes of systemic interactions that emerges as an organisation's culture.

While Schein (2010:14), regards organisational "culture as a concept is thus an abstraction", meaning that organisational culture is much more than the sum of its parts and includes both the visible (codes of conduct and structures) and invisible (beliefs and perceptions) (Schein 2010; Kuenzi, Mayer & Greenbaum, 2019). The inference is that organisational culture is a highly complex system made up of numerous characteristics and interactions that interact with one another and appear to influence one another. In line with system complexity, organisational culture is viewed as emerging from a multitude of non-linear[7] characteristics and interactions.

According to Woermann and Cilliers (2012:447-448), "the paradigm of complexity offers a challenge to traditional reductive explanations, which are premised on the assumption that complex systems can be completely understood in terms of their component parts". Stated differently, complexity of systems is made up of selected information and unpredictability, which results in the emergence of various patterns and structures as the organisation as a system evolves and organises itself into something new (Ferlie, 2007). The implication is that phenomena such as organisational culture, cannot be known in their full complexity and require "an engagement with complexity thinking" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:448). Complexity, simply defined, is "things that lack simple explanations" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:447). In this study, organisational culture is viewed as a complex system and the theoretical underpinnings of systems thinking and complexity theory[8] are applied

[7] "Non-linearity refers to interactions that are non-linear. Non-linearity guarantees that small causes can have large results, and vice versa. It is a precondition for complexity" (Cilliers, 1998:4). Stated differently, non-linearity is described as outputs not being proportional to inputs: small changes can trigger large effects and the behaviour of the whole cannot be explained from the sum of the parts (Ryan, 2019). Due to the multitude of non-linear characteristics and interactions, systems cannot be simplified without compromising some of their complexity. As a result, any model of a complex system will exclude other levels of complexity (Woermann, 2010).

[8] Complexity theory is associated with concepts such as emergence, non-linearity, decentralised control, feedback loops, recursion, and self-organisation, and is expressed in formulas such as "the whole is greater than

to facilitate the discussion of the interrelatedness of the study's three central concepts, namely, organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit.

### 1.2.1 Organisational culture: systems thinking and complexity theory

As people searched for ways to rationalise their interactions with the world, system thinking, as an integrated whole made up of interconnected parts emerged over time. These rationalisations sought to provide explanations for what the world is, how it works, and to justify interventions aimed at changing, controlling, or constraining future behaviour (Merali and Allen, 2011). Merali and Allen, 2011:1 refer to system thinking as the existence of a distinct entity that can be identified and explicitly defined as 'the whole' based on a description of a system as an integrated whole made up of interconnected parts. The creation of 'the whole' from a collection of interconnected parts can be attributed to 'the whole' but not to any of the individual parts that comprise and informs the whole as more than the sum of its parts. The composition (what the components are made of), structure (how components are connected) and organisation (how the components interact in order to maintain coherence of the whole) identify the system (Merali and Allen, 2011).

Kahn (2014) states that systems' thinking is not based on a single discipline, but are rather a gathering of a wide range of theories that share a set of underlying assumptions about reality.

An organisation is a large system consisting of various parts that are dynamically related to each other, and which influence each other (Kahn, 2014; Teerikangas & Hawk, 2002). Teerikangas and Hawk (2002:9) refer to systems thinking as "how best to view a system as a whole that is interacting with its environment and consists of a set of complex, interrelated parts, and subsystems […] where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, but as a whole where the parts are richly connected".

The key assumptions which underpin organisational systems thinking are: (a) an organisation is a system which is made up of interdependent sub-systems; (b) the sub-systems interact with each other, with the organisational system, and with the

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the sum of its parts" or "small events can have large consequences." The science of complexity encompasses many disciplines and a wide range of phenomena (Ryan, 2019).

environment; and (c) some common characteristics that are found in one sub-system will be present in another sub-system (Cavanagh, 2006). In an organisational context, Kahn (2014:8) refers to the “dynamic interplay of the parts”. The implication of this “dynamic interplay” is that organisational interactions are non-linear, without clear causal links. The non-linearity of organisational interactions means that the interactions can run in both directions, without being categorised as cause and effect recognising the presence of multiple levels, feedback loops, and dependencies (such as individuals influencing and affecting each other).These multiple levels of influence, feedback loops, and dependencies means that small inputs can give rise to large outputs (and visa versa) (Roux, 2011). The notion of complexity is seen as a systems property and expands on the ideas of systems thinking (Preiser, Biggs, de Vos and Folke, 2018). Thus, when considering complex phenomena from a complexity perspective, it is understood that there is non-linearity between constituent parts of a system. In other words, it is impossible to predict the “resultant effect of a certain configuration of parts” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:449). This means that the output is not directly proportional to the inputs, and emergence or those properties of the complex system cannot be understood by the parts and interactions of the parts alone (Preiser et al., 2018).

In addition to non-linearity, organisational interactions are also reflexive. The dynamics of reflexivity, in complex systems, present as emergent traits of behaviours and properties that are not apparent from single parts, but are instead the result of the interactions, dependencies, or relationships they form when placed together in a complex system (Lahiri, 2022). Organisational culture may be considered as an *emergent* property of an organisation in that it *emerges* from the dynamic, reflexive, and non-linear interplay of the different parts of the system. Emergence is described by Martell, Emrich & Robison-Cox (2012:142) as:

> … the consequence of interactions among individuals within a system, the product of which defies prediction by a simple aggregation of individual-level behaviour, as there is no simple relationship between the nature of what emerges and the individual actions that produced it.

The progression from systems' thinking allows one to select and apply abstractions to make sense of the dynamics that underpin individual and collective behaviour to complexity thinking which is appealing because it provides one with concepts used to characterise social behaviour in the human sciences (emergence, adaptation, transformation, and diversity) and allows one to develop models that capture some of the richness and diversity[9] of human existence (Merali and Allen, 2011).

In line with complexity theory, organisational culture is therefore the product of a multitude of non-linear characteristics and interactions. The dynamic interplay that Kahn (2014) refers to means that the interaction between objects in the system can progress, aggregate, and gather momentum, potentially leading to unpredictable outcomes throughout the system. In the context of this study, organisational culture is viewed from a complexity thinking perspective, wherein complex systems such as organisations, tend to exhibit emergent phenomena which include increasingly unexpected and, novel patterns, structures, dynamics and entities (Goldstein, 2016).

When organisational culture is also understood as a complex system from a complexity perspective, it means that a multitude of interactions – conscious and unconscious – are operating within the system and are influencing the system in a non-linear way. For instance; understanding how organisational culture affects hiring decisions is based on acquired perceptions, in a particular environment, and the constant evolving dynamic interconnections, through the exchange of information that is permitted and supportive of such behaviours become the unconscious organisational culture (Tetlock & Mitchel, 2009).

In this study, unconscious bias is considered as such a driver which operates outside of employees' awareness, but exerts an influence on selection decision-making. It is therefore necessary to reflect on the concept of unconscious bias.

[9] Diversity, in this study, is defined as heterogeneity in terms of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, ability, thought, values, culture, lived experience, personality, parental status, level of education, rank and position or a combination of any of these characteristics (April, K, 2022; Galinsky et al., 2015; Kaur & Mittal, 2014; Mazur, 2010; Zinn, 2022).

## 1.3 Unconscious bias[10]

Unconscious bias is described as social stereotyping by categorising certain groups of people based on arbitrary criteria (Whysall, 2017). Unconscious biases are the attitudes or stereotypes that unconsciously affect one's decisions and can lead to biased outcomes (Roxburgh & Hansen, 2015; Staats & Patton, 2013). According to social psychology research, the process of organising similar objects or people together and the related unconscious bias "can result in, and perpetuate individuals' implicit reliance on stereotypes" (Lee, 2005: 4). Unconscious bias arises from mental shortcuts, referred to in psychology as a "heuristic", which may result in discriminatory practices. Heuristics may speed up the decision process, but are dependent on instincts and intuition (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982).

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), state that individual behaviours are influenced by organisational system outcomes (representations, structures, philosophies, strategies). O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991), propose that the organisational norms and behaviours, unconsciously affect outcomes, supporting discrimination against the "out-group" (those who are not aligned with established norms) as compared to the "in-group"[11]. Ingrained in-group attitudes may prevent employees from appropriately or independently thinking through employee recruitment decisions as thoroughly as required, thus causing recruiters to default to heuristics (Breger, 2010).

Unconscious bias is involuntary and influences an individual without his/her awareness or intentions (Greenwald & Krieger 2006; Jost et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2015; Stanovich, 2016). Unconscious bias also includes a tendency to favour one's own in-group, a categorisation that is often automatic and unconscious (Dali, 2018; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Lee, 2005). Saul (2013:40) states:

[10] In this study the term "unconscious bias" is used. The notion is also referred to as "implicit bias" in the literature.
[11] See Ross (2008) and Staats (2014). Colloquial terms associated with this phenomenon include "like-for-like", fostering a "mini-me" culture, finding someone who fulfils the vague and elusive notion of being a good "fit" for a role, or identifying someone with whom you have "chemistry".

> … [unconscious biases] affect the way we perceive, evaluate, or interact with people from the groups that our biases target. [...] [P]sychological research over the last decades have shown that most people – even those who explicitly and sincerely avow egalitarian views, hold [...] implicit biases against such groups as blacks, women, gay people and so on. This is even true of the targeted group. So ... women can be biased against women.

In the context of decision-making, heuristics often play a contributing role in sub-optimal decisions, due to systemic judgment errors (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Stanovich, 2016; Whysall, 2017). In particular, unconscious biases may result in discriminatory selection decisions (Lee et al., 2015; Slaughter & Kausel, 2013; Staats & Patton, 2013). Due to the very nature of unconscious bias, it is not easily identified by individuals or groups, and yet has far-reaching consequences if not identified and managed in an organisation. According to Roxburgh & Hansen (2015:1):

> [U]nderstanding unconscious bias and its role in recruitment and selection is essential for organisations that are looking to diversify their workforce. Not only can unconscious bias disadvantage gender, ethnicity, social and cultural diversity, it also harms an organisation's ability to respond to more complex stakeholder demands.

Unconscious bias is therefore significant in the context of selection decisions, which ultimately rely on human judgements (Linos & Reinhard, 2015). Lee (2005:485) states that unconscious bias permeates all human interactions and so impacts selection decisions: "the prevalence of unconscious bias has manifested in hiring practices". It is precisely because unconscious bias operates unconsciously that it can have the unintended consequence of decreasing the quality of selection decisions at both the individual and organisational levels (Whysall, 2017).

According to Roxburgh and Hansen (2015:1), unconscious bias in the context of HRM not only affects "who and how we recruit, but why". The same authors describe unconscious bias in decision-making as follows:

> Unconscious bias is a mental shortcut of sorts, necessary as to how we operate as humans, but one that can also, without intent, interfere with good decisions and lead to biased outcomes. Although many decisions we make are objectively informed, through training and reflection, another decision process flies under the radar – rapid-fire associations and assumptions, based on our prior experience, that operate outside our conscious awareness.

The prevalence of unconscious bias and the extent of its consequences depend on certain conditions within the workplace. According to Lee (2005), three antecedents encourage stereotyping: Firstly, stereotyping might occur when the individual is from a minority group within an otherwise homogenous group (for instance, a woman on an otherwise male board of executives). Secondly, an adverse interview in which a potential employee is assessed as "less similar, less likeable and less likely to perform well, and as exhibiting lower levels of PO fit" (Bye et al.,:19), is often attributed to the employee's social categorisation based on stereotypical perceptions (Bye et al., 2013; Kristof-Brown, 2000) (for instance, a male nurse within the nursing profession – a profession dominated by women). Thirdly, stereotyping might occur when evaluation criteria are ambiguous, or when the decisions rely on subjective evaluations, such as during unstructured interviews[12] (Blackman, 2017:183) and potential employees are subjectively assessed for PO-fit.

Person-job fit (PJ-fit) and person-organisation fit (PO-fit) are both used as recruiting assessment mechanisms in employee selection; this study focuses on unconscious bias in the domain of PO-fit. Thus, to further understand how organisational culture and unconscious bias interact in recruitment selection decisions, it is necessary to explore the concept of PO-fit.

[12] Goldstein et al., (2017): One prominent factor that can affect the reliability and predictive validity of an employment interview is the structure of the interview questions. The most basic distinguishing attribute for interview question types is whether the questions are structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Structured questions are pre-planned questions presented in an orderly manner with little or no follow-up questions on the part of the recruiter. Semi-structured interviews are comprised of guidelines that the interviewer can use while also adapting the interview questions for a specific candidate. Unstructured questions are questions that usually develop spontaneously during the interview and are often referred to as 'small-talk'. Interviews are used in order to obtain candidate information and ought to be objective and impartial (Kausel et al., 2016; Rivera, 2012; Scholz & Scholz, 2018).

## 1.4 Person-organisation fit (PO-fit)

As mentioned, Kristoff-Brown, Jansen and Colbert (2002:985) describe organisational culture as “a set of values that provide unwritten rules of behaviour”; PO-fit is the process of establishing whether potential employees share the values of the organisational culture (Anderson, Spataro & Flynn, 2008; Cable & Edwards, 2004; Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Kooij & Boon, 2017; Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013; Lu, et al., 2020; Mercurio, 2016; Sylva et al., 2019). In other words, PO-fit refers to the extent to which a candidate’s values align with those of the organisational culture (Bye et al., 2013). Yogamalar and Samuel (2016:250), refer to PO-fit as the “shared values [that] represent the similarity between the individual values and organizational values”. PO-fit can be referred to as “organisational culture value fit”, since it aims to capture the value dimensions of a person and organisation, in order to justify PO-fit in person–organisational culture profiling (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). Although researchers often hypothesise that organisational cultural similarities between organisations and potential employees matter in organisational selection decisions systematic practical research on the role of organisational culture in hiring is virtually non-existent (Rivera, 2012).

According to Vianen (2000), PO-fit is most often used in employee selection decisions. By critically analysing the concept of “fit” and “cultural matching”, Rivera (2012:1000) argues that “hiring is more than just finding the most qualified candidate; rather, it relies heavily on cultural matching”. More specifically, Rivera’s study on the hiring practices of organisations finds that “[e]valuators described the notion of fit as being one of the three most important criteria they used to assess candidates in job interviews; more than half reported that it was the most important criterion at the job interview stage, rating [PO] fit over analytical thinking and communication” (Rivera, 2012:1007).

The use of PO-fit in selection decisions is based on research that indicates PO-fit positively affects individual performance and is a predictor of an employee’s commitment and job satisfaction (Boon, 2017; Chatman, 1989; O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). A high level of PO-fit also reduces withdrawal behaviours and

results in a more productive and profitable workforce (Boon, 2017; Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). According to Tom (1971), Byrne (1971), and Schneider (1987), PO-fit is based upon the "similar-to-me" phenomenon, in which individuals are attracted to, join, and remain in organisations where they feel that they are similar to other employees. These desires are thought to be the primary driving force in how individuals evaluate their PO-fit (Edwards & Cable, 2009). The premise is that an organisation is chosen by prospective employees who are similar to existing employees. Consequently, Schneider (1987:442) states that the "better the PO-fit between individual expectations and the reality of organizational life, the higher the job satisfaction and the longer the tenure".

The perspectives described above align with the definition that PO-fit is based on the level of similarity and congruence between prospective employees and the organisation as a whole (Billsberry, 2007; Chatman, 1989; Carless, 2005; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Sunstein & Hasie, 2015). PO-fit often results in a high level of cohesiveness in an organisation. However, cohesive groups may be prone to intergroup phenomena such as discrimination and stereotyping (Dasgupta, Banaji & Abelson, 1999). Kristoff (1996:3) defines PO-fit more explicitly as the "compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both".

Despite indications that PO-fit serves as a predictor of employee performance, commitment, and satisfaction (Chatman, 1989; Boon, 2017; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991), PO-fit as an employee selection approach, remains "questionably defined and often misunderstood" (De Cooman, et al., 2019:646). The practice of recruiting for PO-fit has been questioned by several scholars as to whether PO-fit is of benefit to organisations (Subramanian, Billsberry & Barrett, 2022). For instance, Arthur et al., (2006:797), conclude that "PO-fit is not a good predictor of job performance" and organisations must be cautious when using PO-fit for selection decisions. Besides, Venkatraman (1989:423) states that "although it is common for theorists to suggest relationships using phrases and words such as *matched with, contingent upon, consistent with, fit, congruence, and co-alignment,* precise

guidelines for translating these verbal statements to the analytical level are seldom provided".

Linos & Reinhard (2015) stress the subjectivity of hiring for PO-fit and state that it depends on how organisations make assumptions about who will fit with the organisation. Many studies indicate that subjective measures are used to determine PO-fit (Green et al., 2018), and that it tends to be based on the recruiter's subjective opinion about what constitutes PO-fit (Slaughter & Kausel, 2013; Wallace & Pillans, 2016).

Morley (2007) suggests that PO-fit in selection decisions – particularly in a variety of cultural settings and with more diverse groups – poses significant challenges because of the diversity of value systems, and wide variation in the meaning and definition of work across cross-cultural and heterogeneous workforces. In other words, defining PO-fit in selection can mean that recruiters reject anyone who is different from the organisational culture. Kalman and Frost (2016) found that when attempts are made to blend diverse groups through diversity initiatives, the leveraging of the benefits of diversity and different perspectives is diminished since employees adjust their views and behaviour to align them with the prevailing organisational culture. This also suggests that people can feel inhibited in expressing views that are not aligned with organisational culture, as they are expected to adjust to an organisation's way of doing things (Wallace & Pillans, 2016).

As PO-fit is based on the extent to which a candidate's values reflect the values of the organisational culture (Bye et al., 2013), organisational culture is an integral part of the PO-fit concept. By identifying organisational culture as a cause of discrimination[13], it can be argued that any discriminatory beliefs and values that are part of an organisation's culture can influence selection decisions (Green, 2005). Recruiting for PO-fit will not necessarily lead to unfair discrimination – if say, diversity is highly valued within an organisation's culture and the organisation actively builds a

[13] According to Lippert-Rasmussen (2006), the term "discrimination" is used both as a negative evaluation of certain acts or practice and as a neutral term that simply indicates making a distinction or differentiating. Discrimination in the context of this study refers to the act or practice of negatively evaluating an individual or group of people based on certain arbitrary criteria, thus denoting "unfair discrimination". When the term "discrimination" is used in this study, it indicates unfair discrimination.

diverse workforce and organisational culture. In that case, hiring for PO-fit will strengthen diversity in the organisation. On the other hand, if organisational culture is constituted by unfair discriminatory beliefs and values, hiring for PO-fit creates an environment for unfair discriminatory selection decisions to flourish. Furthermore, the current organisational culture is reinforced when only people who fit with it are selected for employment.

Various research studies (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Furnham & Palaiou, 2017; Slovensky & Ross, 2012) indicate that when selecting candidates, recruiters are often influenced by factors such as age, gender, race, obesity, and attractiveness. Dali (2018:1) affirms that "demographic diversity characteristics may become grounds for discrimination and inequality resulting from biased attitudes and prejudiced behaviours". In fact, Harvard researchers found that the highest level of unconscious bias (70 percent and above) was directed at the following stigmatised groups of people (among others): blacks, elderly, disabled and overweight (Dali, 2018).

Hiring for PO-fit leads to a high level of cohesiveness and homogeneity in organisations, which is essentially the objective thereof. Although neither cohesiveness nor homogeneity is problematic, these concepts are closely related to the dynamic of "groupthink (Janis, 1971; Hart, 1991; Valine, 2018). The nature and dynamics of groupthink are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

In the following section, this intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit is discussed further. It will be argued that hiring for PO-fit illuminates the problematic link between organisational culture and unconscious bias in selection decisions made during the recruitment process.

## 1.5 The intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in selection decisions

As stated in Section 1.2.1, viewing an organisation as a complex system implies that there are dynamic and reflexive interrelations between parts of the system, which

give rise to emergent phenomena (such as organisational culture) in a non-linear way. The reflexive and non-linear nature of organisational dynamics means that predictive outcomes of interrelations cannot be established, and therefore, the reflexive and non-linear interplay of the parts, rather than the parts themselves should be the object of inquiry (Kahn, 2014). In this section the reflexive, non-linear and dynamic interplay of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit is expanded upon.

Because an organisation is a complex system that does not exist independently of the parts that make it up, its existence is defined by the interactions that occur between its components. Therefore, features of organisational culture emerge only as a result of these interactions (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010:267). Section 1.2.1 argues that organisational culture is an emergent phenomenon that is created not only by its *visible* manifestations (visible structures, processes, and behaviours within an organisation), but also by its *invisible* aspects (the underlying assumptions that shape behaviour, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of employees).

The imbrication of organisational culture and PO-fit is embedded in the very definition of PO-fit: candidates must fit the culture and share the values of the organisation. Furthermore, organisational culture is perpetuated when PO-fit is applied in selection decisions. The intersection of organisational culture and PO-fit has important implications. Firstly, when an organisation selects candidates for PO-fit, it could lead to unfair discriminatory selection decisions when the organisational culture (which is integral to PO-fit) is discriminatory. Secondly, based on the assumption that individual parts of the system derive characteristics from the whole (Kahn, 2014), it can be argued that discriminatory beliefs within the organisation might also be embedded in employees that take part in selection processes and decisions. Furthermore, organisational culture is the abstraction of attitudes, beliefs and norms that are often unconscious (Schein, 2010; Schur, Kruse & Blanck, 2005). Stated differently, the unconscious patterns, beliefs and norms are present, yet unstated or invisible within the organisational culture. Bearing in mind that unconscious bias is social stereotyping based upon attitudes, beliefs or norms, it follows that unconscious bias can affect one's decisions and lead to biased outcomes (Roxburgh & Hansen, 2015; Staats & Patton, 2013).

The relationship between organisational culture and unconscious bias is challenging since employees and the organisation continually influence the prevailing organisational culture (Giorgi, Lockwood & Glynn 2015). As mentioned in Section 1.2.1, organisational culture, as an emergent phenomenon, comes into being through conscious and unconscious aspects as a complex organisational system that is created by employees' habits, beliefs, values, and ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting (Bennett & Bennett, 2008; Cleland & Durning, 2015). The influence of unconscious bias manifests in organisational culture as abstractions of these unconscious values and beliefs. Hence, depending on the nature of the organisational culture, employee attitudes, beliefs, or norms can emerge as unconscious bias and perpetuate a certain type of behaviour that may influence selection decision-making. The implication is that when using PO-fit, a candidate can fail to be selected due to unconscious bias within the organisational culture (which is central to PO-fit) (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Reskin, 2005). Thus, through the workings of PO-fit, unconscious bias can problematically influence employee selection, leading to unfair discrimination against individuals and a lack of diversity within the organisation.

Furthermore, research indicates that organisational culture plays an important role in sustaining unconscious bias, given its determining influence on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Pless & Maak, 2004; Whysall, 2017). PO-fit can also decrease organisational diversity as one generally tends to hold unconscious biases that favour one's in-groups (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Reskin, 2005). A way in which organisational culture is perpetuated is when only candidates who fit the organisation's values and beliefs are hired. A reason for this perpetuation of organisational culture is the tendency to select candidates based on "in-group" bias wherein individuals who are 'one of us' (i.e., the in-group) are more favourably considered, compared to others referred to as the "out-group", meaning, those who differ from us (the in-group employees of the organisation) (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). In-group preference is associated with one's emotions and feelings for the in-group and can surface as unconscious bias.

In terms of employee selection, in-group bias can influence people to support those who are most like themselves (Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh, 2003; Lee et al, 2015). When unconscious bias surfaces as in-group preference in selection decisions, the homogeneity of an organisation can lead to "groupthink" when selection decisions are made. Groupthink is a process of collective rationalisation and stereotyping of out-groups, indicating the unconscious bias of a homogenous group when members begin to think alike during decision-making processes (Glebovskiy, 2019; Myers, 2022; Sims & Sauser, 2013). Groupthink then becomes the shorthand for systemic unconscious bias, which can lead to discrimination and a lack of diversity in an organisation.

Based on the arguments presented in this section, unconscious bias is not only an unconscious part within organisational culture, but is simultaneously an unconscious and contributing *driver* of organisational culture. The implication of this is that unconscious bias, through the workings of PO-fit, problematically influences employee recruitment selection decisions, leading to unfair discrimination of the individual and a lack of diversity within the organisation (Hennekam, et al., 2019). These dynamics within the context of recruitment and selection processes are synthesised in Figure 3.

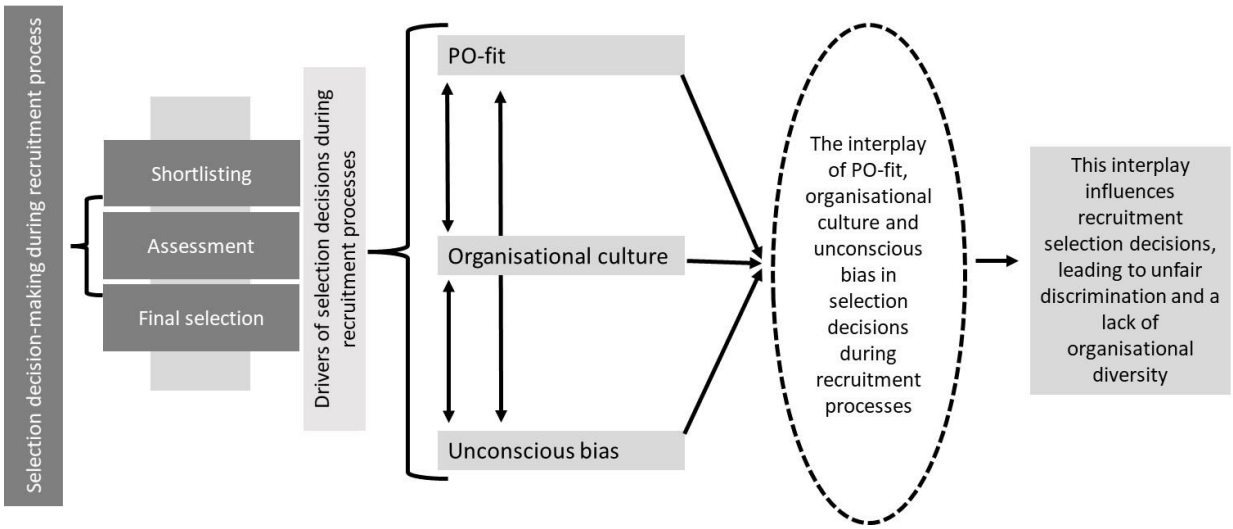


**Figure 3: The intersection of organisational culture, PO-fit, and unconscious bias in the context of recruitment selection processes**

(Own diagram)

## Summary

Recruitment involves searching for and selecting the best candidate for a particular job within an organisation. In this chapter, the selection stages within the recruitment process were focused upon and explained, followed by a brief overview of the different assessment approaches used to make selection decisions.

The three key concepts central to this study were defined and discussed. Firstly, organisational culture was defined as “a set of values that provide unwritten rules of behaviour” for employees (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002:985) and was discussed from a complexity perspective, in which an organisation is a system consisting of various parts that are dynamically related to, and influence each other (Kahn, 2014). It is argued that organisational culture emerges from the dynamic, reflexive, and non-linear interplay of the different parts of the system and, in line with complexity theory, organisational culture is described as the emergent property of complex interactions.

Secondly, the conscious and unconscious nature of organisational culture was explored. It was argued that the attitudes, beliefs or norms underlying unconscious bias, are present in organisational culture regarded as a complex system consisting of a multitude of visible and invisible parts in complex systemic interaction with each other. Although some aspects that contribute to organisational culture are not explicitly known or named, they can still exert significant power on the organisations’ culture. Thirdly, hiring for PO-fit was explained as the tendency to select (or reject) a candidate based on the extent to which their values fit (or don’t fit) those of the organisational culture.

Finally, the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in employee selection decisions during the recruitment process was outlined. Unconscious bias can negatively affect selection decisions, which can result in unfair discrimination of the potential candidate and a lack of diversity within the organisation.

Chapter 2 explores the ethical risks of applying PO-fit criteria in selection decisions, regarding discrimination against the individual and a lack of organisational diversity.

# Chapter 2

## The ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, PO-fit and unconscious bias

## Introduction

There are a variety of decisions which organisations encounter during recruitment processes, some of which carry ethical risks. These ethical risks include discrimination against individuals and a lack of diversity in organisations. According to Dietz and Kleinlogel, (2017), research on discrimination and a lack of diversity consequent to recruitment processes have seldom been conducted from an ethical perspective. Whilst organisations often deny, or fail to recognise the existence of discrimination, it is fundamentally important to acknowledge and address discrimination in organisations.

In Chapter 1, it was argued that, in the selection context, unconscious bias and organisational culture interact with PO-fit in such a way that ethical risks of discrimination against the individual and a lack of diversity arise in the organisation. As PO-fit is based on the extent to which a candidate's values reflect the values of the organisational culture (Bye et al, 2013), organisational culture is integral to the PO-fit concept and any discriminatory beliefs and values that are part of an organisation's culture will influence selection decisions. However, as stated, recruiting for PO-fit will not necessarily lead to unfair discrimination. If, for example, diversity is highly valued within an organisation's culture and the organisation actively builds a diverse workforce and organisational culture, hiring for PO-fit will strengthen diversity in the organisation. On the other hand, if organisational culture is constituted by unfair discriminatory beliefs and values, hiring for PO-fit creates an environment that reinforces unfair discriminatory selection decisions. In this chapter, the ethical risks of PO-fit, as a recruitment tool are expanded upon.

Firstly, discrimination is an ethical risk when using PO-fit in selection processes. Secondly, it is argued that discrimination against the individual could lead to

systemic discrimination in the organisation, due to aggregating effects. These aggregating effects result in a lack of organisational diversity, thus influencing organisational culture, and causing harm to those individuals who are discriminated against. Thirdly, groupthink is explored to indicate how the internal environment of an organisation shapes collective behaviour, and – when driven by unconscious bias – can lead to discrimination and a lack of diversity. Fourthly, organisational culture could fail to incorporate strategies for diversity and to recognise and accommodate multicultural environments.

Whilst many organisations recognise potential benefits of a diverse organisation and support commitment to diversity, very often these strategies are unsuccessful (Pless & Maak, 2004; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017). Based on existing research findings, despite the fact that an organisation can display high diversity among employees (various backgrounds, ethnicities, races, genders, abilities, ages, and sexual orientations), efforts at inclusion are limited. Though various definitions and description of organisational diversity exist, many organisations often refer simultaneously to ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’; this notion presents diversity and inclusion as a symbiotic relationship. In effect, where there is diversity there should also be inclusion (Hudson-Ward, 2014). Other sources however, distinguish between diversity and inclusion. For example; Wallace and Pillans, (2016) state that diversity means increasing representation of underrepresented groups and inclusion is the resolve to create an organisation that values employees within a diverse organisation. Frost and Kalman (2016) add to this, stating that diversity is about recognising differences and real inclusion is about accepting these differences in order to add real value. However, employees in a minority group may feel as if they don’t belong, that their perspectives are not valued, or that they can’t be their true selves at work. Conversely, it is easier for an organisation with a very homogenous workforce to foster high levels of inclusion. In both these situations, there is unlikely to be a variety of perspectives that yield innovation, high customer satisfaction, and the resulting financial performance evident in high-performing organisations (the joshbersin company, 2020). This tendency is explored in this chapter from an ethical perspective by considering the organisational motivation behind implementing diversity strategies.

The motivation behind organisational diversity strategies is considered from three ethical perspectives – a utilitarian approach, a deontological approach, and a complexity approach to ethics. It is argued firstly that a utilitarian approach to organisational diversity could be one of the reasons why so many diversity initiatives in organisations fail. Although a deontological approach could translate into more successful diversity initiatives compared to a utilitarian approach, it lacks in one core area, namely, it does not take complexity into account. Therefore, a third perspective is offered, namely the ethics of complexity.

## 2.1 The risk of discrimination in the PO-fit approach to recruitment

This section argues that discrimination is one of the significant ethical risks of using PO-fit in selection processes. In that discrimination is the unethical and the differential treatment of groups, partially brought on by the characteristics that set the groups apart and that prejudice affects people by treating them differently based on their membership in social groupings (Hennekam et al., 2019; Velasquez, 2014).

Although organisations are required by law to have policies in place to prevent unfair discrimination, studies have shown that such policies have only moderating effects on discrimination (Hennekam et al., 2019). Discrimination refers to the existence of clear and factual evidence showing that an individual has been openly discriminated against. Clearly, employment discrimination due to unconscious bias is not a form of discrimination, as the recruiter is unaware of the biases underlying his/her selection decisions. Unconscious bias suggests that when a person considers another person – for instance, during the recruitment process – the recruiter's unconscious bias about the candidate can influence their selection decision, even though there was no deliberate intent to discriminate. Research on unconscious bias indicates that it can have an impact on how candidates are assessed; and this in turn affects employee recruitment and organisational outcomes (Sans, 2020).

In the South African context, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the Employment Equity Act (1998) offers protection against discrimination and promotes respect for and protection of human dignity, thus enshrining the right of the

individual not to be discriminated against. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018a), respect for human dignity is a prerequisite for valuing diversity. The OECD (2018a) states that respecting dignity and valuing diversity constitute critical filters through which people process information about other cultures and how they engage with people who are different from themselves. Valuing human dignity and diversity also promotes inclusion. People who promote these values become more aware of themselves and their environment, which strongly motivates against exclusion (OECD, 2018b).

In an organisational context, respect for and the protection of dignity require an organisational culture within which diversity is valued (Hughes & Brown, 2018; Liu, Bergman & Hernandez, 2020). As Pirson, Goodpaster and Dierksmeier (2016:473) state: “human dignity [should be] at centre stage” if organisational diversity is to be taken seriously. In an organisational culture that does not treat employees with dignity, and where employees do not treat each other with dignity, work stress results, along with a lack of recognition (of people, their concerns, and their basic needs), undermining people’s self-esteem, and disengagement; all of which are harmful to employee well-being (Hughes & Brown, 2018; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017).

PO-fit in recruitment is a complex phenomenon. Billsberry and Searle (2007:5) acknowledge that there is “the near impossibility of making definitive judgements about the ability or suitability of a person for a job”. When using PO-fit in recruitment, it is difficult to isolate, with any degree of certainty, specific characteristics that might contribute to ongoing high performance. Díaz, Ramírez Marín and Díaz (2019) recognise that PO-fit is driven by unconscious bias. Although the nature of unconscious bias varies in its particular characteristics and contexts, it usually follows each organisation’s culture. Unconscious bias in the culture of an organisation can unconsciously influence employee selection decisions, such as those that “exhibit favouritism towards candidates that belong to their social group (race, gender or age)” (Lee et al., 2015:1). This is affirmed by Sunstein and Hastie (2015) who states that hiring decisions often go badly wrong because of the unconscious use of *similarity* in selection decisions.

Chapter 1 (Section 1.5) argues that the intersection of unconscious bias, organisational culture, and PO-fit can have a negative ethical impact on recruitment processes, leading to discriminatory selection decisions (Dietz & Kleinlogel, 2017; Hennekam et al., 2019), especially in cases where diversity is not valued within the organisational culture. According to Velasquez (2014), employment discrimination is characterised by a disregard for individual merit and bias against certain individuals, with a resulting harmful impact on the candidate. Employment discrimination violates the basic human right of equality, thus amounting to unethical practice (Petersen & Dietz, 2005). When employment discrimination occurs as a result of the intersection of PO-fit, organisational culture and unconscious bias, the individual's dignity, which is his/her right to be valued for their own sake, is violated (Bal & De Jong, 2017; Pirson, Goodpaster & Dierksmeier, 2016). This tendency is elaborated on in subsection 2.4.2.

Hellman (2011) takes the position that discrimination is wrong because it violates the individual's right to dignity, regardless of whether the discrimination was intentional or not. Lippert-Rasmussen (2006) and Arneson (2022) agree that it is irrelevant whether the discrimination was intentional or non-intentional, and Berndt Rasmussen (2020:734) goes further by stating that "the intentional/non-intentional divide carries no immediate moral significance". Although, non-intentional discrimination occurs in the mind of the individual, it begins and ends in the social world. The influence of discrimination spreads from the individual mind, subtle and hidden, through thoughts and feelings, to words and actions that causes harm in society (Banaji, Bhaskar and Brownstein, 2015). Lippert-Rasmussen (2006) and Arneson (2022), agree that the wrongfulness of discrimination is reflected in the harm that it causes.

At the outset, discriminatory actions violate the principle that individuals within groups are equal; in other words, racial and sexual discrimination may be based on condescending stereotypes that infringe on one's right to be treated equally. Velasquez (2014:395) argues that discriminatory practices violate the principle of equality, for example, "racial and sexual discrimination may be based on degrading stereotypes which undermine self-esteem […] violating their right to be treated as equals"; and that discrimination "places those who are discriminated against in lower social and economic positions".

To understand the link between discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity, it is necessary to reflect on two concepts – individual discrimination and institutional discrimination – as the impact of using PO-fit in selection is not limited to an individual level, but extends to the organisational level. Velasquez (2014:378) differentiates between individual and institutional discrimination as follows:

> Individual discrimination consists of discriminatory acts of one or a few individuals acting on their own and so has a one-time or limited effect, while institutional or institutionalised discrimination consists of the discriminatory acts that are the frequent outcomes of the actions of all or many members of an institution and of the regular processes and policies of the institution. Institutionalised discrimination tends to have recurring and widespread effects within the institution and even beyond.

Velasquez (2014:378-9) further states that “during the last century, an important shift in emphasis has occurred – from seeing discrimination primarily as an intentional and individual matter to seeing it as an institutionalised and perhaps, unintentional outcome of routine corporate behavior”. A lack of organisational diversity has been identified by researchers as an institutionalised outcome following discrimination against individuals during employee selection (Cox & Blake, 1991; Hennekam et al., 2019). Discrimination on an individual level (in the circumstance of employment discrimination) can lead to institutionalised outcomes (such as a lack of organisational diversity).

## 2.2 The risk to organisational diversity from using the PO-fit approach to recruitment

According to the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP), respect for diversity is the “understanding that each individual is unique and recognising our individual differences” (Mawande, 2019:3). Similarly, Hudson-Ward (2014) recognises diversity as more than the individual’s observable traits, in that it ought to include "the whole of an individual's different contributions and lifestyle choices", for

example, diversity in thought, opinion, behaviour, motivational factors, generational differences, and cultural customs. A diverse organisation is one where employees represent a multitude of differences. In essence, diversity denotes difference and heterogeneity (Abascal, Xu & Baldassarri, 2021).

When considering the concept of PO-fit in relation to diversity, a critical issue arises. Recruiting based on PO-fit means that there must be similarity between an individual and the organisational culture. Where diversity denotes difference and heterogeneity, PO-fit denotes sameness (similarity) or homogeneity. The assumption is that hiring for PO-fit will strengthen the existing organisational culture. In other words, an organisation that values diversity and which actively promotes building a diverse workforce and organisational culture will expect a potential employee to both add diversity and value diversity in others. However, in a homogeneous organisation where diversity is not valued within its organisational culture, recruiting for PO-fit will have the effect of strengthening the existing homogenous organisational culture – whether this happens consciously or unconsciously.

Ross (2008:11) states that “despite our best conscious efforts, the organizational unconscious perpetuates the status quo and keeps old patterns, values, and behavioral norms firmly rooted”. This perpetuation of the status quo can be linked to the workings of in-group and out-group dynamics in organisations. Over time, the behaviour of individuals begins to shape organisational norms and values (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Individuals who are aligned with these norms and values then become the in-group which is founded through shared commonalities that keep the existing organisational culture intact. Those who are not aligned with the norms and values become the out-group which is then unconsciously discriminated against (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

According to Berndt Rasmussen (2020:740), seemingly insignificant differences on the individual level (micro level) can become building blocks and emerge as “sizeable inequalities across many individuals or longer time spans”. The same source refers to Thomas Schelling’s (1971) “modelling of the systemic effects of individual preferences [which shows that] even very slight individual preferences, for

example, one's neighbourhood's racial profile, can quickly lead to very segregated neighbourhoods (macro level)".

As stated in Chapter 1, *emergence* is one of the key attributes of complex systems. Berndt Rasmussen (2020:740) describes the process of emergence as follows:

> [E]mergence is concerned with the consequence of interactions among individuals within a system, the product of which defies prediction by a simple aggregation of individual-level behaviour, as there is no simple relationship between the nature of what emerges and the individual actions that produced it.

Nair, Gaim and Dimov (2019:7) cite Mihata (1997) who describes emergence as "the process by which patterns or global-level structures arise from interactive local-level processes. This structure or pattern cannot be understood or predicted from the behavior or properties of the component units alone" and the combination of elements with one another brings with it something that was not there before. It is the dynamic interrelations that exist between the parts of a complex system that give rise to emergent phenomena (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012).

In a recruitment context, emergence from within a complex system implies that small instances of discrimination may occur at multiple decision points across the recruitment process, which, when perpetuated at multiple intervals or across multiple contexts, can have substantial effects on aggregate outcomes (Berndt Rasmussen, 2020; Hennekam et al., 2019). The aggregating effect of discrimination can result in a lack of organisational diversity, and cause harm to those individuals who are discriminated against (Hennekam et al., 2019).

The PO-fit approach is designed to keep the existing organisational culture intact (Lee, et al., 2015). Through shared assumptions that exist, organisational culture influences employees into perceiving, thinking and feeling in a certain way. According to Kok (2008:454), these shared unconscious frameworks "remain deeply embedded in social structures, practices and attitudes", resulting in discriminatory employment selection decisions (Chatman & O'Reilly 2016; Díaz, Ramírez Marín

and Díaz, 2019; Ployhart, Weekley & Baughman, 2006). Consequently, organisational hiring for PO-fit leads to a high level of cohesiveness and homogeneity. Although neither cohesiveness nor homogeneity is problematic on their own, these concepts are closely related to the dynamic of groupthink – an important concept to consider, that as stated, specifically associated with groups that display high levels of cohesiveness and homogeneity (Janis, 1971; Hart, 1991; Valine, 2018).

In the following section, the concept of groupthink is explored to indicate how the internal environment of an organisation shapes collective behaviour, and – when driven by unconscious bias – leads to discrimination and a lack of diversity because of the complexity of organisational culture.

## 2.3 Groupthink and its impact on organisational diversity

According to Gilshan and Chambers (2020), when concurrence-seeking becomes so dominant in an in-group that it tends to override representative judgement of alternative actions, groupthink exists. Groupthink is often an unconscious underlying approach when members of a group perceive a threat to group homogeneity (Gilshan & Chambers, 2020). As such, groupthink is closely related to unconscious bias. Unconscious bias arises from mental shortcuts, or heuristics, which may result in discriminatory practices (Lee, 2005) and includes the inclination to favour one's own in-group (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Lee 2005).

In essence, groupthink then refers to systemic unconscious bias (Stephens, Rivera & Townsend, 2020), which can result in discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity.

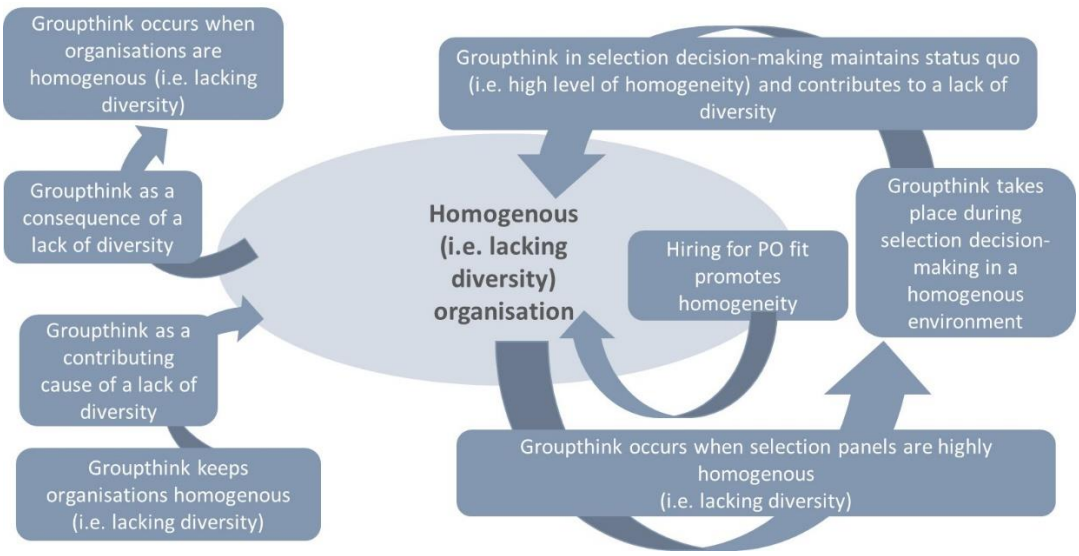


**Figure 4: The dynamics of groupthink in relation to hiring for PO-fit**

(Own diagram)

As indicated in Figure 4, groupthink can be regarded as an indirect consequence of hiring for PO-fit, since that approach promotes homogeneity in organisations. In other words, when there is a high level of homogeneity in an organisation (which is the objective of hiring for PO-fit), groupthink often occurs (Janis, 1972; Hart, 1991). Valine (2018) states that groupthink occurs in homogenous groups where people share similar backgrounds (and in organisations where there is a lack of diversity). When an organisation is highly homogenous (because of hiring for PO-fit) it can also lack diversity. Otherwise stated, employee behaviours influenced by organisational system outcomes (representations, structures, philosophies, strategies) define organisational norms and behaviours which unconsciously support discrimination of the out-group (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Groupthink refers to an “illusion of agreement”, and to an excess of group cohesiveness that limits the ability to build new ideas (Beebe & Masterson, 2014:123), which then avoids questioning or exploring the nature of thoughts and ideas. When an organisation is highly homogenous and lacks diversity, groupthink plays a significant role in maintaining the status quo by minimising conflict through avoiding “critically testing, analysing and evaluating ideas” (Beebe & Masterson, 2014:123; Hällgren, 2010). Since groupthink plays a role in maintaining the status quo, it also contributes to a lack of diversity in organisations that are already

characterised by a high level of homogeneity and a lack of diversity. When groupthink (the tendency of groups to make decisions that preserve the status quo) surfaces during the recruitment selection process in highly homogenous organisations, it compromises the ability of the selection panel to make selection decisions that challenge the status quo and promote organisational diversity. Should a member of a selection panel suggest the appointment of a candidate who will increase diversity in the organisation, groupthink can effectively eliminate such a suggestion, due to the tendency to reject new ideas and marginalise any critics of the in-group (Northouse, 2016).

In the context of recruitment decisions, groupthink may prevent recruiters from thinking through hiring decisions as thoroughly as is required, causing recruiters to rely on heuristics (CIPD, 2015), based on instinct and intuition, which may speed up decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982). This is problematic if an organisation that lacks diversity sets out to become more diverse, as groupthink keeps the status quo intact.

## 2.4 Ethical approaches to diversity

Based on existing research (Pless & Maak, 2004; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017), many organisations state that they are committed to diversifying their workforce, but very often these strategies are unsuccessful. In this section, organisational diversity is explored from an ethical perspective, by considering different ethical approaches to organisational diversity strategies.

### 2.4.1 Utilitarian approaches

Organisations adopt diversity initiatives for various reasons, making use of several ethical approaches. The strictly utilitarian approach of many organisations to business ethics has been questioned by various scholars (Jones & Stablein, 2006; Noon, 2017; Pless & Maak, 2004; Van Dijk, Van Engen & Paauwe, 2012; Wallace, Hoover & Pepper 2014; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004), who ascribe to it (in part) as the lack of success of organisations in fostering diversity.

Utilitarianism is an approach where the moral status of the action is determined by the consequences of the action, and not the action itself. This approach focuses on the consequences of the decision to create good outcomes for the majority of people. The good outcomes are weighed up against bad outcomes, or harm. In an organisation, an action or decision is considered 'good' if it promotes general welfare more than any other alternative (Velasquez, 2014). Therefore, when making ethical decisions, the right choice of action is believed to be the one that has the greatest utility or produces the greatest number of positive consequences for the organisation. When applying this approach in the workplace, the applicable participants are identified, and the consequences evaluated in terms of expected benefits or harm for each participant, and decisions are then based on the option that produces the best overall result. In the context of selection, this theory would evaluate the consequences of candidate selection, in order to produce the best possible results for the organisation. Velasquez (2014:84) also states that "an action is right from an ethical point of view, if and only if, the sum total of utilities produced by that act is greater than the sum total of utilities produced by any other act the agent could have performed in its place" (Velasquez, 2014). Thus, the standard utilitarian argument is based on the assumption that "an action (or type of action) is right if it tends to promote happiness or pleasure, and wrong if it produces unhappiness or pain – not only for the performer of the action but also for everyone else affected by it" (Velasquez, 2014:88). This approach assumes that one can measure and add benefits and subtract harms produced. For instance, discriminating among candidates based on only on job related qualifications in order to advance the benefit of the organisation (Velasquez, 2014).

Velasquez, 2014 argues that when a utilitarian approach to diversity is followed, the implication is that diversity is not based on the intrinsic value and dignity of the individual, but instead, in terms of what he/she can bring to the organisation's bottom line. A utilitarian approach to diversity promotes the instrumentalisation of employees using "the end justifies the means, as long as the consequences of actions accrue more benefits than harm across stakeholders relative to alternative actions" (Dietz & Kleinlogel, 2017:2).

According to Mazur (2017:12), all business decisions that have an impact on other people must be based on how these decisions will affect those people. This principle states that all people have "the inalienable right to respect for [their] dignity, irrespective of [their] ethnicity, nationality, social status, or sex." When potential employees are valued for the diversity they can bring to an organisation solely for profit maximisation, this is referred to as instrumentalisation. Stated differently, in an organisational context, when the primary concern for an organisation is profit maximisation, employee's practical value or usefulness is instrumentalised. According to this perspective, an individual's worth is determined by his or her ability to achieve the best possible outcome, regardless of who benefits and who may be harmed in the process. Using this approach, a recruiter focuses solely on a candidate's competence for the job and will select those persons who can unquestionably be used to serve organisational objectives of profit maximisation, no matter the circumstance.

According to Galinsky et al. (2015:742), the moral reason for valuing diversity in a business is that "diversity increases creativity and innovation, promotes higher quality decisions, and enhances economic growth because it spurs deeper information processing and complex thinking". However, when the value of diversity lies in what it can do for an organisation, it is called the "business case for diversity" (Green, et al., 2018:2). This is another view of a utilitarian approach simply focused on organisational outcomes, where diversity is valued only because it satisfies business objectives, such as legal obligations or bottom line. In other words, furthering diversity simply through satisfying organisational objectives and economic means, could lead organisations to neglect an employee's dignity in itself and risking diversity instrumentalisation (Frémeaux, 2020). Also, positive discrimination practices, such as quota systems, risk diversity instrumentalisation, and are criticised because they may exacerbate rather than alleviate organisational diversity responsibilities. As a result, some diversity measures risk taking an overly categorical approach which could ultimately undermine the significance of diversity. By setting specific targets and putting potential candidates into roles to meet quotas may be a quick fix towards regulatory requirements or what one ought to do, but neglects an ongoing responsibility towards valuing a persons' dignity (Vivier et al., 2022). Research indicates that many people who have been employed based on

diversity quotas tend to reject job offers or seldom remain with organisations for long. The reason for this is that diversity feels not to be truly valued in the organisational culture into which they enter, and they often feel marginalised (Gaucher, Friesen & Kay, 2011). Diversity strategies that focus only on the business case for diversity are likely to exacerbate existing attitudes, stereotypes, and divisions within an organisation (Whysall, 2020:5). Therefore, organisations must go beyond quotas for legal requirements by acknowledging the limitations of this strategy and the incompleteness of our knowledge of others, acknowledging and critically examining how prejudices and stereotypes manifest themselves every day in all interactions and relationships (Vivier et al., 2022).

Green, et al. (2018:2) argue that "there is a compelling business and moral case for organisational diversity by ensuring that everyone is treated with dignity and has fair access to resources [because it] is simply the right thing to do". Organisations that value diversity by expressing it as an explicit organisational value understands that "having a diverse workforce is morally correct and makes economic sense" (Green, 2010:587).

### 2.4.2 Deontological approaches

Although there are many different deontological theories of ethics, deontology is most closely associated with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). According to Kant, people can never be treated as a means to an end, but rather should be treated as ends in themselves (Bal, Kordowicz & Brookes, 2020). Kant (cited in Pirson, Goodpaster and Dirksmeier, 2016:465) states that "everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity".

According to Wallace, Hoover and Pepper (2014:318), "the equality moral reasoning for valuing diversity is that it is the 'right' choice, regardless of the 'good' that may result". Equality moral reasoning for valuing organisational diversity is a deontological approach "focussed on universal principles and goodwill" and means that "diversity is valued because the organisation has a duty (or legal mandate) to do

so" (Wallace, Hoover & Pepper, 2014:318). This approach asks which rule is being followed when making a decision and if this could be made into a universal principle or not, for example, could this rule be applied to all similar decisions in future? If not, that decision should not be taken (Rachels and Rachels, 2015). In other words, rules represent general guidelines of what is good, such as in the pursuit of organisational diversity. However, this approach tends to be inflexible in considering contextual circumstances, for example, whilst organisational diversity is valued, is the availability of candidates, in a particular region, recognised and acknowledged (thereby revising the rule).

According to Velasquez (2014), a deontological approach to diversity means that an individual should be treated as an end in themselves, and not as a means to an end. This approach assumes that "each person has a moral right to be treated as a free person equal to any other person and that all individuals have a correlative moral duty to treat each individual as a free and equal person" (Velasquez, 2014:395). Stated differently, according to a deontological approach, each person should be treated as an end, rather than as a means to an end; each person has an ethical right to be treated as a free and equal person, and they have an ethical duty to treat another as a free and equal person (Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017). When applying this approach in organisations there are clear rules to follow and a duty to follow these rules no matter the consequences. Hence, the argument for diversity does not inherently value diversity but rather recognises diversity as long as it supports competitive advantage and organisational profit, say, by considering minority groups as a means to an end, in this way, violating the deontological principle that people ought not to be treated merely as a means (van Dijk, van Engen and Paauwe, 2012). This is very different from a utilitarian approach to diversity which is focused solely on the practical value or usefulness of a person in an organisational context and the person's ability to produce the greatest outcome regardless of who benefits and who is harmed in the process.

A deontological approach to the ethics of diversity is closely associated with Kant's *categorical imperative*. Kant states that there is an absolute moral principle or 'categorical imperative' in which one should "act only according to that maxim by

which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Rachels and Rachels, 2015:121). According to Kant (cited in Johnson & Cureton, 2022), the categorical imperative is a strategy for ethical decision-making that is based on principles that are "objective, rationally necessary and unconditional"; and it should be followed in all contexts and under all circumstances. As such, the categorical imperative is based on *a priori* foundational principles that can be applied "in all times and cultures" (Johnson & Cureton, 2022).

Kant's categorical imperative is a meta-ethical position that is not aimed at developing ethical principles, but rather serves as a tool to evaluate the ethicality of existing principles in a way that is categorically applicable and universally valid (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). The categorical imperative is based on the premise that "if certain contingent principles are universalisable, then the principles are deemed morally correct" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:451).

The categorical imperative is essentially an empty rule, as it does not generate contingent ethical principles, but acts merely as a measure for evaluating ethical principles which already exist (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012).

Kant's absolutist approach is positioned as a universal ethical standard that apply to one's actions regardless of the context within which these actions take place. Hence, this approach relies on principles that apply without exception across time, context and in all situations and lacks depth and imagination. An in-depth analysis of Kantianism and Kant's categorical imperative falls beyond the scope of this study. Only a brief overview of the categorical imperative is provided, since it forms the background to establishing "the provisional imperative" (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010; Woermann & Cilliers, 2012) and the characteristics of imagination and provisionality discussed in what follows.

Simply stated, utilitarian or deontological models cannot adequately capture the complexity of ethics in complex systems. The ethics of complexity is presented as a theoretical framework that provides guidance when ethical decision-making is the objective. This perspective requires a very specific position from decision-makers which moves beyond a utilitarian approach that uses people for short-term

organisational needs and profit, or a deontological approach, which is duty based and which relies on rules and principles without exception.

According to Woermann and Cilliers (2012:448), “the paradigm of complexity offers a challenge to traditional reductionist explanations, which are premised on the assumption that complex systems can be completely understood in terms of their component parts”. In the following section, the ethics of complexity – as proposed by Preiser and Cillliers (2010), and Woermann and Cilliers (2012) – is discussed as an alternative perspective on the ethics of organisational diversity.

### 2.4.3 The ethics of complexity

From a complexity perspective, complex systems are understood to be “dynamic, local interrelations that exist between the parts of a complex system, and which give rise to emergent phenomena (which are often not reducible to base laws)” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:449). Based upon this understanding of complex systems – and acknowledging the impossibility of completely understanding or describing complex systems – the ethics of complexity is a structural component of complexity thinking (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012) and is based on the assumptions that complex systems and complex phenomena cannot be “completely understood in terms of their component parts” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:448). The same authors theorise that any engagement with complex phenomena inherently requires critical positioning that acknowledges the limits of our knowledge and Preiser and Cilliers (2010), and Woermann and Cilliers (2012) propose the *critical position* from which to consider ethics about complex phenomena.

The critical position requires acknowledgement that all knowledge is provisional and limited and, by extension, that any ethical decision-making requires us to make choices and to acknowledge the assumptions that our choices are based upon (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010; Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). Woermann and Cilliers (2012:450) state that the critical position requires intellectual honesty and modesty which “denotes sensitivity to the levels and limits of our understanding” and that we need to remain responsible for our choices. This responsibility requires us to acknowledge that the choices we make in ethical decision-making will lead to “a

different spectrum of possible consequences, different successes and failures, and different strengths and weaknesses" (Allen, 2000:93). Or, to put it another way, we must act even if we are aware that we cannot do it perfectly and that we must accept responsibility for those results.

Preiser and Cilliers (2010), and Woermann and Cilliers (2012) propose the *provisional imperative* to engage with ethical decision-making concerning complex systems and phenomena, from a critical position. The provisional imperative states that "when acting, always remain cognisant of other ways of acting" (2012:451). The provisional imperative is based firstly on an understanding that ethics are informed by both our limited knowledge and our identity (who we are), and secondly, that the complexity of ethics cannot be reduced to a substantive system that dictates action based on universal, ethical principles. The provisional imperative can be understood as a critical position or attitude towards ethical decision-making (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). The implication is not that it is impossible to interpret attitudes; it merely means that all interpretations are conditional and temporary and are applicable to a certain context and time frame (Cilliers, 1998). According to Woermann & Cilliers, (2012), four attitudes underlie the critical position of the provisional imperative, namely: provisionality, transgressivity[14], irony[15], and imagination, and that these attitudes support and foster ethical decision-making.

Although all four of these attitudes may be relevant to the context of this study, only provisionality and imagination were applied, for the following reasons. The limited scope of the study and that the attitudes of provisionality and imagination, were deemed to provide the most insight into how interventions for diversity are fostered. In that, it is not that provisionality or imagination will lead to risk mitigation but that provisionality and imagination interventions, such as PO-add, foster diversity and aims towards mitigation of ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, PO-fit and unconscious bias.

[14] Transgressivity requires the questioning and "violation of accepted or imposed boundaries" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:453). This mechanism is based on action that follows the question: "What should I do?"

[15] Irony refers to the "discrepancy between what is meant and what it said, what is expected and what happens, what is meant and what is understood, or what is said and what is done" (Hasa, 2020). Irony, as a mechanism of the provisional imperative, is a way in which the idea of an objective reality can be subverted and thereby enhances awareness of the impossibility of concluding universal rules for making ethical decisions (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012).

### *The mechanism of provisionality*

The mechanism of provisionality requires an acknowledgement that the decisions we make are tentative or provisional. According to Woermann and Cilliers (2012:452), provisionality is “the outcome of the contingent nature of our knowledge claims”. Stated differently, the knowledge on which we base our decisions is dependent on certain factors. These factors, according to Woermann and Cilliers (2012), are the spatial and temporal dimensions within which knowledge claims are made.

The spatial dimension refers to the contextual nature of our knowledge claims and implies that the meaning we assign to concepts cannot be determined out of context. The temporal nature of knowledge claims implies that the meaning someone assigns to a concept will change over time. When provisionality is applied, ethics is understood as being something tentative and provisional, and as such, will need to be reconsidered and deconstructed. As stated by Woermann and Cilliers (2012:453): “a complex understanding of ethics posits the good as something which is necessarily subject to revision and deconstruction; and, hence as something which is provisional”.

When ethical decision-making is the aim, provisionality requires the decision-maker to recognise firstly that the knowledge one uses to make a decision is tentative and provisional, and secondly, that the decision that is made is spatially and temporally contingent on a certain meaning, and by extension, on certain ethics, and thus should be open to reconsideration by recognising that knowledge and meaning is not governed by pre-established rules, are contingent and contextual, and cannot be fixed in a representational way. Simply stated, the context itself is not clear, must be interpreted, reassessed and transformed with emphasis that knowledge and meaning is complex and which obliges one to reconsider decisions in order to develop adequate strategies to control ones actions.

### *The mechanism of imagination*

As another mechanism supporting the provisional imperative, imagination can be seen as a creative jump to "engage with a future that we cannot calculate" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:457). Allen (2000:103) notes that creativity, as reflected by imagination, "is the motor of change and the hidden dynamic that underlies the rise and fall of civilizations, peoples, and regions, and evolution both encourages and feeds on invention". The provisional imperative requires taking cognisance of, and engaging with options and ways of being that might not be considered within the limitations of our knowledge systems. Woermann and Cilliers (2012) cite Verstraeten, (2000: ix), who states that imagination is required to generate a variety of possibilities that lie outside of "closed or limited hermeneutical circles", imagination is a mechanism that enables engagement with diversity. This allows for the "possible development of models that capture some of the richness and diversity of human existence, by experimenting with possible worlds in which consequences of our actions play out over time" (Merali & Allen, 2011:50).

Woermann and Cilliers (2012:457) make an important distinction between requisite diversity, which is "the minimal level of variety needed for a system to cope with its environment"; and excess diversity, which "allows a system to experiment internally and thereby generate several strategies for operating in a given environment". In this regard, Woermann and Cilliers (2012:458) cite Allen (2001), who "argues that excess diversity is needed for long-term systems survival, since the 'fat' of excess knowledge and diversity is needed both for breaking out of our conceptual schema and for imagining, and thereby experimenting and innovating for the future".

Thus imagination constitutes one's ability to create variety and options; to be able to diversify out of one's closed or limited interpretations by taking cognisance of other rules and other ways of being; and to "transform the framework we apply when apprehending the world" (Cilliers, 2005:264). In other words, by fostering diversity, one can imagine a better and more sustainable future, one that reinforces variety and options by accepting others while respecting differences. This fostering of diversity will support innovation and creativity, thereby defying perceptions that

attempt to frame societies as fixed, homogeneous systems. Hence, to transform existing frameworks in understanding the world, we need imagination to imagine a better future.

## 2.5 Organisational diversity and the ethics of complexity

In applying the ethics of complexity to organisational diversity from the provisional imperative, ethics is understood as constitutive of knowledge and identity, "rather than a normative system that dictates right action" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:447). As such, the provisional imperative and its four supporting mechanisms serve as guidance to consider organisational diversity from an ethical perspective. Two of the supporting mechanisms of the provisional imperative of complexity were discussed, namely provisionality and imagination. The guidance provided by the ethics of complexity and the provisional imperative is deemed relevant for this study in considering how the risks to organisational diversity might be mitigated. Firstly, by considering the ethics of organisational diversity from the perspective of the ethics of complexity, there is an upfront acknowledgement that ethics, in any context, are innately complex – hence the appropriate title of Woermann and Cilliers' (2012) paper: *The ethics of complexity and the complexity of ethics*. Secondly, the provisional imperative allows for the acknowledgement of conceptual complexity – diversity is complex, and the meaning thereof is dependent on context and shifting across time and space. Thirdly, an organisation is a complex system, which means that the very context, within which the ethics of diversity is considered, is itself irreducibly complex. In the next chapter how the provisional imperative helps foster diversity is explored.

## Summary

In this chapter, the ethical risks of PO-fit as a recruitment tool were discussed in terms of four focus areas. Discrimination was identified as an ethical risk resulting from using PO-fit in selection. Individual discrimination could lead to systemic discrimination as a result of aggregating effects within a complex system. This aggregating effect was identified as a lack of organisational diversity, influencing

organisational culture, and causing harm to discriminated-against individuals. Groupthink was also explored to indicate how the internal environment of an organisation shapes collective behaviour, and – when driven by unconscious bias – leads to discrimination and a lack of diversity because of the complexity of organisational culture. The motivation behind organisational diversity strategies was examined from three ethical perspectives: utilitarian, deontological, and complexity. It was argued that a utilitarian approach to organisational diversity could be one of the reasons why so many organisations' diversity initiatives fail. A deontological approach to the ethics of organisational diversity was also considered; however, while this approach may result in more successful diversity initiatives than a utilitarian approach, it was argued that a deontological approach to ethics lacks in one critical area, namely, it does not account for complexity.

As a result, a third approach which is guided by the ethics of complexity and the supporting mechanisms of provisionality and imagination, using interventions that uphold diversity, was deemed applicable in considering how the risks to organisational diversity might be mitigated.

The ethics of complexity necessitates that decision-makers take a critical stance and acknowledge that all knowledge is provisional and limited, and, by extension, any ethical decision-making necessitates choices and accepting the assumptions that choices are based upon (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010; Woermann & Cilliers, 2012).

Chapter 3 discusses various strategies to mitigate the risks of using PO-fit in selection decisions. Specific focus is placed on the guidance provided by the ethics of complexity, the provisional imperative, and its two associated supporting mechanisms of provisionality and imagination.

# Chapter 3

## Mitigating the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, PO-Fit and unconscious bias

### Introduction

In this chapter, various strategies to mitigate the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, PO-fit and unconscious bias are discussed, by referencing two supporting mechanisms, namely, provisionality and imagination. The focus is firstly on rethinking the use of PO-fit in selection decisions. It is argued that the primary requirement for organisations is to clarify what is meant by PO-fit and to critically reflect on the use and unintended consequences of applying PO-fit criteria in selection decisions. A further mitigation strategy is proposed, that is, to hire for PO-*add* rather than PO-*fit*. PO-add is a new concept proposed by the researcher.

Although the focus is on PO-fit within the context of HRM and selection decisions, from a complex systems perspective, the mitigation of risk does not lie solely in the domain of HRM, since selection decisions are seldom taken by recruiters alone. Selection decisions include others in the organisation, such as business leaders or managers of business units, thus adding further complexity to the decision-making process. Furthermore, within a complex system, component parts interact and influence one another in recursive, non-linear, and non-predictive ways. This means that component parts that are seemingly unrelated to HRM can still influence recruitment decisions (for example, technologies).

Since PO-fit is inextricably linked to organisational culture, a deep understanding of organisational culture and its concomitant complexities and dynamics is necessary to mitigate the risks associated with PO-fit in selection decisions. In this chapter, cross-cultural coaching is presented as a mitigation strategy, emphasising the need for system-wide coaching to ensure that systemic change is achieved. It is further argued that the first step in terms of mitigating the risk of unconscious bias is to make the unconscious, conscious. This is followed by a discussion on how groupthink – as a reflection of collective unconscious bias – could be minimised. In

addition, various strategies that pertain specifically to selection processes are presented. Lastly, it is argued that organisations need to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of their organisational diversity strategies, to co-create real and sustainable change in terms of diversity and inclusion.

## 3.1 Rethinking the use of PO-fit in selection decisions

PO-fit is problematic in terms of the recruitment process – it leads to certain ethical risks with discrimination and a lack of diversity, which need to be mitigated. Given these ethical risks of using PO-fit in selection decisions, one could argue that organisations should simply not use the concept of PO-fit in this context. The problem with this simplistic solution lies in the inextricable links between PO-fit, organisational culture, and unconscious bias within a complex system – where the interaction between component parts is recursive, non-linear, and non-predictive. These components are continuously interacting and influencing each other. The removal of one component, such as the use of PO-fit in selection processes, will not necessarily remove the impact and influence that organisational culture and unconscious bias have on recruiters' selection decisions. This means that even if PO-fit aspects are not specified, together with the lack of understanding of essential characteristics needed to assess PO-fit, organisational culture and unconscious bias would still impact recruiters' decision-making, even though such an impact may be unknown. Similarly, due to the non-predictive nature of complex systems, by simply removing the use of PO-fit does not mean that all behaviour and decisions can be explained by referring to it. In fact, the characteristics may be so complex that it is difficult to categorise, and the effect within the complex system makes clear-cut prediction of behaviours, virtually impossible.

Furthermore, if an organisation's culture embraces diversity; PO-fit can be a useful selection tool in ensuring that organisational diversity is sustained. Evidence has also shown that PO-fit positively affects individual performance; is a predictor of an employee's commitment and job satisfaction; reduces withdrawal behaviours; and results in a more productive and profitable workforce (Boon, 2017; Chatman, 1989; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). To mitigate the

ethical risks of using PO-fit in selection processes, it is, therefore, necessary for organisations to critically reflect on the use of PO-fit in selection decisions, rather than simply doing away with it.

Fricker (2009), states that critical reflection enables one to manage inappropriate assessments and mitigate the negative impact of harmful stereotypes. In terms of PO-fit, this means that organisations must become aware of the possible unintended consequences of using PO-fit criteria in selection decisions.

Firstly, critical reflection would entail understanding the intersection of PO-fit, organisational culture, and unconscious bias, as presented in this study. *These steps are the foundation of any further strategies to mitigate the risks associated with using PO-fit in selection decisions.* Once organisations understand how these concepts are in interplay with each other, further specific mitigating strategies can be established and applied.

Secondly, critical reflection would include the acknowledgement that knowledge claims (i.e., knowing what PO-fit means) are contingent on the context and time frame within which PO-fit is considered (Ryan, et al, 2017). Such an approach toward critical reflection is in accordance with one of the guiding principles of the ethics of complexity, namely provisionality. When provisionality is applied, PO-fit can be understood only as something tentative and provisional, which needs to be reconsidered and deconstructed. This implies that the meaning that is assigned to a concept such as PO-fit cannot be determined out of context; it is not static, but shifts depending on the time and context within which PO-fit is used. Therefore, reconsidering the meaning of PO-fit, needs to be a recurring and ongoing process, rather than a once-off deliberation. That said, however, hired employees cannot simply be ‘reconsidered and deconstructed’, the point of departure is to analyse and examine the underlying mechanisms, such as PO-fit criteria, and how the hiring decisions were made, within what context and time period. This allows for reflection and scrutiny of selection decisions in order to reconsider and deconstruct selection decisions, with a view to future improvements.

Thirdly, critical reflection is required in terms of what is understood as PO-fit in a particular organisation. As stated by Chuang and Sackett (2005), many organisations do not specify the dimensions of PO-fit particular to their organisations, and recruiters are left guessing as to what PO-fit means in their context. Recruiters then form their understanding of PO-fit, and the applied criteria likely encompass the recruiters' characteristics (Chuang & Sackett, 2005; Rivera, 2012). As discussed in Chapters 1 & 2, the reason why the applied criteria are so closely linked to the recruiters' own characteristics is due to the propensity of people to make selections based on similarity to themselves. This tendency is referred to as 'in-group preference'.

In-group preference is associated with the emotions and feelings of those considered to be the 'in-group' and can surface as unconscious bias. In terms of employee selection decisions, in-group bias can influence people to support those who are most like themselves (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2003; Lee et al, 2015). In-group preference is a powerful driver of discrimination, and also plays a key role in 'groupthink'. In this context, groupthink refers to in-group attitudes which prevent employees from appropriately or independently thinking through employee recruitment decisions as thoroughly as is required, thus causing recruiters to default to the use of heuristics (Breger, 2010).

Viewing PO-fit through a provisional lens and deconstructing what is understood as PO-fit, would allow hidden and unconscious meanings underlying the construct of PO-fit to emerge and be addressed consciously. In other words, when recruiters jointly create and calibrate selection criteria, it allows them to explicitly state and defend their own preferences, exposes their biases, and ensures that equal and fair criteria are applied consistently. Critical reflection in the context of recruitment is the process of learning from and through experiences, to develop new insights into one's self as well as the organisation's recruitment practices. This frequently entails questioning routine assumptions. It also requires the recruiter to be self-aware and critical of one's own response within an organisational context. The objective is to critically reflect on recruitment practices and processes, obtain new insights, and thus improve future selection decision-making (Finlay, 2008).

To critically reflect on recruitment practices and processes also requires acknowledgement that decision-making is a complex process that takes place within a complex system. Furthermore, such reflection needs to be preceded by an acknowledgement of the impossibility to consider or comprehend the decision-making process or the complex system in its entirety, and that any decision could have unintended consequences. Any decision-maker working from the ethics of complexity perspective would need to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). In other words, recruiters ought to be able to defend their selection decisions; however, if these decisions are revealed as biased, recruiters need to accept responsibility and the consequences therein.

Besides being beneficial to agree on a clear statement of what an organisation's criteria for PO-fit are, recruitment decision-makers also need to understand and acknowledge that such PO-fit criteria should be regularly reconsidered, rather than a once-off process, aligned with the mechanism of provisionality.

In summary, to mitigate the risks associated with using PO-fit in selection decisions, the key organisational work that needs to be done is to; firstly, critically reflect on understanding the intersection and impact of PO-fit, organisational culture and unconscious bias to establish mitigating strategies. Secondly, as PO-fit is provisional and contingent on context and time, it is necessary to regularly reconsider and deconstruct PO-fit. Thirdly, to critically reflect on what is meant by PO-fit within a specific context. These steps are the foundation of any further strategies to mitigate the risks associated with using PO-fit in selection decision-making and ought to assist in becoming more aware of the existence, impact and consequences of unconscious bias (Greenwald & Banaji, 2017) in selection decision-making.

## 3.2 PO-add as supplement to PO-fit

The researcher has conceptualised the principle of *PO-add*, indicating that an organisation should select employees based on how a candidate can *add to* organisational culture, even if they may not necessarily be a fit for the existing organisational culture. When an organisation recruits based on PO-fit, the criterion is how closely the candidate matches the existing organisational culture, which is often represented statically. On the other hand, PO-add is a *process* with emphasis on the dynamic and non-linear nature of relationships and many components within the organisation. When recruitment processes are based on PO-add, the criteria shift to the potential candidate – how the candidate can add to the existing organisational culture, by bringing new and innovative ideas and experiences, to supplement diversity of values and enrich organisational culture by broadening the spectrum of existing characteristics. Maurer (2018) refers to the importance of selecting employees who have the will and skill to think differently in seeking to achieve organisational growth.

The mitigation strategy of hiring for PO-add – as suggested by the researcher – is based on *imagining* a different practice, in particular, by moving from the traditional conventions of PO-fit to those embraced by PO-add. The motivation for the new strategy is that, by simply limiting decisions and judgements to PO-fit, differences and differentiation are devalued.

Imagination is one of the mechanisms supporting the provisional imperative and can be seen as a way to “engage with a future that we cannot calculate” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:457). The provisional imperative requires taking cognisance of and engaging with options and ways of being that might not ordinarily be considered within the limitations of our knowledge systems. Woermann and Cilliers (2012) as cited by Verstraeten (2000: ix) state that imagination is required to generate a variety of possibilities that lie outside “closed or limited hermeneutical circles”; in particular, it is a mechanism that enables engagement with diversity. In other words, through valuing diversity and inclusion, one can envision a better and more sustainable

future that strengthens options and variety, accepts others, and values individual uniqueness and recognition.

Many organisations refer to 'diversity' and 'inclusion' as one concept; this notion presents diversity and inclusion as conjoined. In essence, where there is diversity there should also be inclusion (Hudson-Ward, 2014). This approach, as referred to in this study, emphasises that diversity and inclusion are not interchangeable – diversity without inclusion simply means many different people, in the same place, at the same time, with no engagement or relationship-building among them (Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, 2021; Robert Walters Group, 2020). Instead, valuing inclusivity should be present along with valuing diversity[16]. Stated differently, an organisation that values diversity also needs to be inclusive; employees need to be comfortable working in a diverse organisation and committed to deliberate acts to ensure diversity and inclusion (Pless & Maak, 2004). Pless and Maak (2004:144) state:

> Building an inclusive diversity culture is a difficult task that requires long-term commitment, as all ''cultural work'' in organizations does. It can be, however, a unique opportunity, as business globalises and the world gets more and more connected, to create a truly diverse organizational culture that incorporates basic human principles and fosters human diversity.

The provisional imperative is of relevance here, as it requires action (Preiser & Cilliers, 2010; Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). As stated by Woermann and Cilliers (2012:453), the critical position "can never simply re-enforce that which is current, but – as the definition states – involves a violation of accepted or imposed boundaries [and] requires bold action".

When recruitment is based on PO-add, candidates who show competencies and behaviours that are inclusive and actively promote a diverse organisational culture should be selected. Inclusion, as an action, is distinctly different from being able to tolerate diversity. Tolerance is "increasingly viewed in a negative light in the extant

[16] Green et al., Diversity and Inclusion at Work (2018: 5): CIPD.

literature and is often understood as the passive acceptance of difference, and, hence, denotes an unwillingness to engage in other perspectives" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:457). Forst (2007) suggests using the word "recognition" of diversity instead of tolerance of diversity. However, recognition still does not signify any conscious act of inclusion. Whether an organisation states that diversity and inclusion are valued, tolerated, or recognised, it remains of key importance that the act of inclusion is valued in a similar way to diversity (OECD, 2018a).

In terms of mitigating the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity, and/or inclusion, various strategies are needed to build a workforce that is comfortable working in a diverse organisation and committed to deliberate acts to ensure diversity and inclusion. In such a context, recruitment needs to be a deliberate act towards diversity and inclusion. That is, organisational culture change initiatives would need to be deliberately designed and implemented to re-consider, challenge, and disrupt the existing organisational culture.

### 3.3 Changing organisational culture

Since PO-fit is inextricably linked to organisational culture, an understanding of organisational culture is necessary to mitigate the risks associated with using PO-fit in selection decisions. Furthermore, organisations ought to recognise the incompleteness of institutionalised interventions and policies around diversity. An ongoing, open, review practice would create a critical, yet vigorous relational reflexivity within the organisation (Vivier, et al., 2022). Therefore, a logical first step would be to recognise what the organisational culture is, by conducting qualitative research and analysis through consultation with those who understand and work with the complexity of organisational systems.

The analysis of organisational culture is a complex matter, as the construct carries many different dimensions, meanings, and interpretations; is multifaceted and multi-dimensional; and is characterised by different points of view (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Cacciattolo, 2014; Da Costa et al., 2018; Filabi & Bulgarella, 2018; Giorgi, Lockwood & Glynn, 2015; Ledimo 2015; Trevino & Nelson, 2011; Weeks, 2010;

Westerman & Cyr, 2004). From a complex systems perspective, it is impossible to completely understand a complex system (such as organisational culture), and further, “any engagement with complexity thinking implies a critical engagement with the status and limits of our knowledge claims” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:448). As soon as we engage with complexity, we have to make certain modelling choices when describing phenomena” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:448), such as analysing the culture of an organisation.

Any attempt to analyse an organisation’s culture through qualitative research and analysis would require the acknowledgement that complete knowledge thereof is impossible. Since such an analysis would be based on subjective choices, the process would require interpretations and evaluations. Woermann and Cilliers (2012:448) state: “Our decisions always involve an element of choice that cannot be justified objectively, but are, in part, based on normative judgements. Otherwise stated, our modelling choices are based on subjective judgements about what matters”.

In the analysis of organisational culture, it would be important to work from a framework that allows for the complexity of the phenomenon under study. As stated in Chapter 1, organisational culture is a complex system of ideas (Kahn 2014); and many organisations see organisational culture as “something an organisation has, in other words, something that is imported into an organisation or created and manipulated by management” (Stapley, 1996:12). The same author goes on to state: “culture is something an organisation is: it emerges from social interactions, as the product of negotiated and shared symbols and meanings”. A framework that allows for exploring different levels of complexity is Schein’s (2010) three-level framework of organisational culture, as discussed in Chapter 1. Such an approach to understanding organisational culture would also take cognisance of the unseen, below-the-surface, and unconscious aspects of organisational culture that manifest for example, due to the contingent nature of knowledge and the series of decisions that are embodied in organisational symbols, artefacts and stories.

The notion of managing the unconscious is a contradiction in terms. It is better then, to talk about managing the organisation towards a state of awareness of its

unconscious aspects – including unconscious biases. The first step towards managing an organisation towards a state of awareness is to identify the nature of its current organisational culture. As stated, this can be done through qualitative research which recognises the systemic nature of organisations and the complexity of organisational culture. As such, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the symbolic space within which organisational beliefs make sense, how to read the relevant knowledge repositories (such as stories, artefacts, and rituals), as well as how the organisation is structured (Painter-Morland, 2008).

### 3.3.1 Re-viewing organisational structures in relation to organisational culture

The *structure* of an organisation and the *culture* of that organisation are inextricably linked. An organisational culture, as an intrinsic factor of organisational behaviour, creates the context and frame of reference for employees by reflecting organisational values and norms. The organisational structure, as an extrinsic factor, can strengthen or transform the existing organisational culture through formal limitations (such as authority, coordination and work groupings) (Janicijevic, 2013:37).

An effective way to establish diversity as a key component of organisational culture is to implement accountable diversity structures (Mazur, 2010). Diversity structures aim to expand the diversity of the organisation (Kaiser et al, 2013), by offering positive benefits – namely, modifying norms around discrimination, raising bias awareness, and increasing organisational trust among groups. Onyeador, Hudson and Lewis (2021:19-26) suggest how to establish accountability using structural interventions such as the following: ensure that leadership, management, and committees are responsible for diversity and inclusion goals and that leadership has the mandate to hold accountable those responsible for diversity and inclusion; establish organisational opportunities for intergroup contact between groups; establish organisational groups for minority employees by providing dedicated space and resources to facilitate networking and representation; and establish inclusive organisational communications by tailoring language that refers to social group differences, including employees' concerns and experiences.

Although diversity structures are intended to create positive environments, they can also have negative implications. Diversity structures potentially create an "illusion of fairness" (Kaiser et al., 2013:504) – a claim supported by Eidelman, Crandall and Pattershall (2009). In other words, even if there is explicit evidence of an organisation's *failure* to promote diversity, employees often defer to the presence of diversity structures; that is, they presume that the organisation is fair, based on having diversity structures in place (Kaiser et al., 2013). This implies that diversity structures – although recognised and put in place with good intent – may not positively influence the value of diversity, but may instead perpetuate a non-diverse organisational culture. The mechanism of provisionality would be beneficial, to emphasise the necessity of regularly reviewing diverse structures and engaging critically with the nature and effect of these structures. So engaging critically with organisational structures such as recruitment practices is of key importance.

Once an organisation has a deeper understanding of the nature of its organisational structure and organisational culture, it can start to implement strategies to change the latter. One such strategy is to implement a system-wide cross-cultural coaching intervention, as discussed in Section 3.3.2.

### 3.3.2 Changing organisational culture through cross-cultural coaching[17]

The system-wide introduction of cross-cultural coaching is proposed as a mitigation strategy for the risks that arise from PO-fit. As mentioned in Section 3.1, the selection decision-making process includes various people within the organisation, such as recruiters, departmental heads and the manager with whom the vacancy lies. System-wide cross-cultural coaching, therefore, impacts not only HRM and the recruitment team but also the broader organisational context. Furthermore, any attempt to change organisational culture should be through working with the whole system, and not only parts thereof.

According to Booysen (2015), cross-cultural coaching is a distinct specialisation within the field of coaching, which can make a major contribution to enabling HR

[17] Another term for *cross-cultural coaching* is *diversity coaching*. The former term is more common, and is therefore used in this study.

practitioners to prepare and support leaders and organisations to deal with the challenges of the multicultural and global business landscape. Cross-cultural coaching can be defined as “working with the awareness of cultural differences” (Plaister-Ten, 2009:77). Booysen (2015:242) describes cross-cultural coaching as

> … a process of assessment, challenge, reflective and reflexive questioning, and support to make sense of how culture influences [the coaching client’s] own beliefs and behaviors and that of others he works with. It also addresses how new cultural-rich meaning can be integrated into existing paradigms to enhance learning.

Cross-cultural coaching reflects the mechanisms that support the provisional imperative. Through cross cultural challenging of organisational culture and organisational structure within the organisation, using reflective and reflexive questioning, organisations place themselves in the critical position that is required by the provisional imperative. This allows organisations to become aware of the contingent nature of their knowledge claims, and realise that the decisions driving their behaviours are highly subjective and constructed within a temporal and spatial dimension that is unique to themselves. A key learning point that cross-cultural coaching can provide in enabling changes in the organisational culture, is that employees begin to understand that what they have learned in their own cultures is not necessarily applicable to the cultures of others (Booysen, 2015).

Subsequent to the tenets of provisionality, cross-cultural coaching aims to guide organisations towards a deeper understanding of the complexity of ethical decision-making. Cross-cultural coaching uses reflective and reflexive questioning to place oneself in the critical position as is required by the provisional imperative. This enables organisations to recognise the contingent nature of their knowledge claims and recognise that the decisions that drive behaviours are highly subjective and constructed within a temporal and spatial dimension that is unique to them. Based on this deeper understanding, the organisation can then move towards reconsidering and deconstructing its own ethical frameworks, specifically in terms of diversity and

inclusion,[18] and progress towards making their own behavioural changes. Coaching is, by its very nature, a change process aimed at behavioural change in an organisation (Stelter, 2014; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2016; WABC Coaches Inc., 2011).

Abbott (2014:324) claims that cross-cultural coaching can have a significant impact when there is “engagement with uncertainty, change and complexity in community, organizational and group contexts”. The same author states that cross-cultural coaching aims to assist organisations in embracing and managing the typical paradoxes that emerge from the multiplicity of realities in a multi-cultural organisation, where each employee is confronted by their own unique perspective. According to Abbott (2014), cross-cultural coaching conversations create a space within which inconsistencies and uncertainty are highlighted. Abbott (2014) further states that “the [cross-cultural] coaching conversation becomes a means by which contextual forces can be given prominence – not discounted. Coaching is a medium by which the complexity of situations can be unpacked, moving clients from being overwhelmed and confused to situations where possibilities emerge” (Abbott, 2014:325).

Abbott’s (2014) positioning of cross-cultural coaching is closely linked to the mechanism of imagination that underlies the provisional imperative. The provisional imperative requires the subversion of the idea of an objective reality, thereby enhancing awareness of the impossibility of concluding universal rules for making ethical decisions. Abbott’s (2014) reference to engagement with uncertainty in cross-cultural coaching implies an acceptance that the future cannot be predicted. Using imagination as a mechanism to support the provisional imperative can be seen as a way to “engage with a future that we cannot calculate” (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:457). This statement is directly related to Abbott’s (2014:324) description of cross-cultural coaching as the idea of engaging with uncertainty. This supports the complexity of situations to be explored through cross-cultural coaching, enabling organisations to shift from being "overwhelmed and bewildered to situations where possibilities arise" (Abbott, 2014).

[18] In this section, the terms diversity and inclusion refer to diversity and inclusion in their broadest sense – that is, not limited to *cultural* diversity and inclusion.

The implementation of cross-cultural coaching in organisations can positively affect the organisational culture, systems and processes (such as recruitment) (Abbott, 2014). Booysen (2015:244) states that cross-cultural coaching can be introduced "throughout all levels of an organization and be institutionalized in its culture. It can become a normal component of everyday functioning and even a driver of success in accomplishing the business strategy".

### 3.4 Unconscious bias: making the unconscious, conscious

Unconscious bias cannot be eliminated, but less harm is possible by increasing employees' awareness of unconscious bias. All employees, on all organisational levels, ought to:

(a) Understand what unconscious bias is
(b) Acknowledge the existence of unconscious bias
(c) Recognise their own unconscious biases

The provisional imperative necessitates awareness of, and participation in options and modes of being that may not usually be considered within the constraints of our current knowledge. Therefore, to reduce the effects of unconscious bias, organisations need to promote active learning and transformational influences, to create innovative and imaginative ways that highlight ongoing possibilities for evolving organisations to manage unconscious biases (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This learning would be through training interventions which are helpful for employees in becoming aware of bias, but in isolation, this cannot solve the problem. Due to the underwhelming nature of unconscious bias training initiatives, Painter-Morland (2008) suggests that alternative solutions need to be created, in conjunction with, existing and standard diversity training techniques and interventions. These should include improving training techniques and training content which often distinguishes between theory and practice and does little to introduce employees to, or familiarise them, with the organisation's subtle and complex environment. In other words, by taking into account the conscious, such as structures and policies and unconscious, such as symbols, artefacts and stories to

assist employees in drawing on both tangible and less tangible aspects of the organisation.

Unconscious bias poses a great challenge in real life, as well as in research activities since individuals cannot disclose biases of which they are unaware. Consequently, social psychologists devised indirect measures to calibrate individuals' unconscious bias (Worden et al., 2020). The Implicit Association Test (IAT)[19] was developed based on social psychology's understanding of unconscious bias, "premised on the fact that what a person says is not necessarily a good representation of all her feelings and thoughts, nor of how she will behave" (Sadiya, 2017:9). The IAT[20] is not a diagnostic test, but rather a way of attempting to bring to the fore awareness that unconscious bias exists, and to assist employees in recognising their own unconscious biases. As Sadiya (2017:9) states, "the IAT [has] now become a popular training tool in diversity programmes and is built around the principle of recognising biases, addressing where they come from and why they may be harmful". Cox and Devine (2022) suggest that the IAT should be used in conjunction with other strategies and interventions. Although there has been criticism of the IAT, specifically whether the IAT can predict racial and ethnic discrimination (Blanton et al., 2009; Carlsson & Agerstrom, 2015), it remains the most used tool in diversity programmes.

Cox and Devine (2022) argue that an empowerment-based approach to dealing with unconscious bias also reduces intergroup discrepancies and promotes diversity. They suggest that empowering people to address their own values has the potential to advance an understanding of their own unconscious mental processes. They base their argument on the premise that values are significant, since they are central to people's sense of self, and are carried across situations and contexts. Thus, meaningful change is much more likely to arise from actions that 1) identify people's personal values to motivate change; and 2) empower people to be effective agents of their own change (Cox & Devine, 2022). Their approach is a prejudice habit-

[19] The IAT (developed by psychologists at Harvard, Virginia and Washington universities) is said to "diagnose hidden racial, ethnic and sexual biases" (Blanton, Jaccard & Burrows, 2015:429). It is available on the internet.
[20] The IAT is only one of many versions of tests designed to evaluate unconscious bias; other measures include the more time-economical Brief Implicit Association Test (BIAT), the Go-No-Go Association Test, the sorting paired features procedure, and the Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP) (Bar-Anan & Nosek, 2014).

breaking intervention[21], focusing primarily on empowering individuals' self-regulation by 1) introducing the concept of unconscious bias; 2) revealing the subtle and powerful consequences of unconscious bias; 3) providing a realistic, self-driven model of change; and 4) providing strategies to reduce unconscious bias. The first two components provide knowledge to increase people's awareness of unconscious bias in a manner that minimises the impact of one's unconscious mind, and the last two components empower participants to critically reflect and engage with change.

Addressing unconscious bias in such a way is directly linked to the mechanism of provisionality which requires an acknowledgement that the decisions we make are tentative or provisional, and dependent on our knowledge claims (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). Stated differently, the knowledge on which we base our decisions is dependent on certain factors, one of which is unconscious bias.

Therein, by making the unconscious conscious, employees can explore how unconscious biases impact their behaviour, through critical reflection and discussion (Buetow, 2018). Thus, cross-cultural coaching could be implemented as a strategy to actively work with unconscious bias in an organisation.

When ethical decision-making is the aim, provisionality requires the decision-maker to be open to reconsideration. Furthermore, the employee needs to accept that increased awareness of one's unconscious bias is tentative, provisional, contextually contingent, and susceptible to interpretation, and therefore needs to be a continuous exercise. Although Cox and Devine's (2022) approach to dealing with unconscious bias focuses primarily on empowering individuals' self-regulation techniques, their evidence indicates the intervention also helps people to become change agents in the world around them.

In the context of recruitment, it is important for those who make selection decisions to critically reflect and discuss how their own biases might impact their decision-making. For such critical reflection and discussions to mitigate the impact of using PO-fit criteria, there should firstly be an existing understanding of the intersection of

[21] A prejudice habit-breaking intervention engages with people's egalitarian values in a way that motivates and empowers them to put effort into reducing unconscious bias.

hiring for PO-fit, organisational culture, and unconscious bias. As argued in Section 3.1, such an understanding is a prerequisite for any mitigation strategy to be impactful.

### 3.4.1 Addressing groupthink as a reflection of collective unconscious bias

In an organisational setting, group socialisation can lead to groupthink. Groupthink was examined in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), demonstrating how an organisation's internal environment shapes collective behaviour and, when driven by unconscious bias, frequently leads to discrimination and a lack of diversity. In essence, groupthink can be likened to a collective unconscious bias that operates in a complex manner (Abele, Stasser & Vaughan-Parsons, 2005). This could pose a significant risk to an organisation, with numerous negative consequences (Sims, 1992, Sims & Brinkmann, 2003).

To counter groupthink, its symptoms and other unconscious biases must firstly be recognised, and secondly, avoided (Valine, 2018). Actions to avoid groupthink include creating an organisational and recruitment culture where respectful challenge and dissent are valued and encouraged. During the selection process, debate and non-conformity should be encouraged, and discussions should be fact-based. Furthermore, any attempts to manipulate data to validate one’s existing thought patterns should be recognised and challenged.

Organisations might also consider supporting so-called “smart-group thinking” (Brecher, 2015). This involves nurturing an environment in which diversity of ideas is embraced, inquiring comments and unconventional opinions are encouraged, ideas and assumptions are subject to a critical evaluation, and a sense of individual responsibility is entrenched for group actions (Brecher, 2015). In such an environment, the risk of harmful groupthink can be minimised (Scharff, 2005).

The risk of groupthink influencing selection decisions can further be reduced by ensuring accountability and transparent recruitment processes and policies. This would include monitoring the effectiveness of recruitment processes and policies;

ensuring diversity within selection committees; requiring post-recruitment reporting to adhere to processes and policies; increasing the transparency of, and accountability for, selection decisions; eliminating language that could dissuade members of under-represented groups from applying and regularly reviewing selection policies to ensure that they contain unbiased evaluation criteria.

Another way in which selection decisions can reduce the consequences of groupthink is to recognise the importance of organisational diversity by referring to ideas and perspectives, instead of demographic characteristics. This requires "recognising the uniqueness and singularity of human beings" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:459) and allows one to generate variety and options to break out of one's "closed or limited hermeneutic circles" (Verstraeten, 2000: ix). These steps are pivotal to practise the provisional imperative and realise that it's "not just about seeing other ways of being, but also about creating new ways of being" (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012:458).

The provisional imperative is of value in mitigating the risk of groupthink in various ways. Firstly, provisionality requires an acknowledgement that the decisions we make are tentative or provisional, and based on limitations inherent in our knowledge claims (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). An approach to decision-making that allows for provisionality will require decision-makers to recognise that the knowledge they use to make a decision is tentative and provisional; and secondly, that their decision should be open to reconsideration and revision. Focusing on the processes by which ethical decisions are made and acted upon, as well as how ethical inferences arise from one's limited knowledge of complex phenomena (Woermann, 2010). Consequently, organisational culture is continually deferred due to perpetual changes and decision-making, approached with provisionality, where the dominant concurrence-seeking behaviour associated with groupthink can be disrupted by focusing on questioning and reconsidering commonly held beliefs and assumed facts.

Decision-makers should constantly evaluate group decisions against their own moral values (Scharff, 2005). Additionally, decision-makers should socialise their peers into questioning and searching to make ethical decisions. Such efforts could help avoid

groupthink by leading peers to confront decisions they feel are not ethically right (Scharff, 2005).

Decision-making based upon the provisional imperative can allow for diverse viewpoints, contrasting opinions, careful exploration of the nature of the problem, consideration of a variety of alternatives, and challenging each proposed solution. This will allow decision-makers to commit to a decision that has been critically reflected upon, and for which individual and collective responsibility and accountability are accepted.

## 3.5 Mitigating strategies pertaining to the use of interviews in the selection process

The recruitment and selection process serves as a filter between the organisation and potential employees and offers a ‘door’ through which employees enter an organisation. The implication of this is that, in some way or another, the recruitment process plays a part in making decisions that determine the extent to which diversity thrives (or not) in an organisation. It is therefore important for an organisation to implement strategies pertaining to the selection process that will mitigate the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity.

While the selection process is marked by ongoing deliberation involving interrelated discursive processes (identifying and grouping candidates; establishing candidate facts by referring to various information sources; determining selection assessment criteria and using various selection approaches), the employment interview is the primary tool used in the selection process (Blackman, 2017; Bolander & Sandburg, 2017; Huffcutt, 2011; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Stephens, Rivera & Townsend, 2020).

However, much research has revealed shortcomings of interviews in predicting employee performance, specifically by using unstructured interviews (Kausel, Culbertson & Madrid, 2016; Rivera, 2012; 2015; Stephens, Rivera & Townsend, 2020). The core issue is that interviewers (recruiters) are subject to unconscious bias that allows subjective inclinations to surpass objective assessments; this often results in less qualified candidates being hired based on a ‘good’ interview, while

more qualified candidates may be rejected based on a 'bad' interview (Batista, 2021). Research suggests that the content and structure of the interview and the interview process is core to minimising the extent of unconscious bias (Stephens, Rivera & Townsend, 2020).

Three types of interviews are mentioned namely, semi-structured, unstructured and structured (Blackman, 2017; Dessler, 2016; Schatz, 2021). The literature indicates that semi-structured and unstructured interviews are more prone to unconscious bias that contributes to stereotyping of candidates (Blackman, 2017; Schatz, 2021). Schatz (2021:27) argues that bias occurs since "information processing is distorted as recruiters are seeking to confirm their stereotypic expectation of an applicant". Rivera adds that interviewers' reaction to candidates is greater than considering "competence, intelligence and technical skills" endorsing expectations and stereotyping (Rivera, 2015:1379). Given the ineffective or even harmful nature of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, organisations should avoid using them (Cohen & Yang 2019; Stephens, Rivera & Townsend, 2020).

The ideal structured interview should be administered as consistently as possible for all candidates (Batista, 2021). It includes the following desirable actions: (a) create a set of structured questions designed to gain information about the candidate's qualifications for the available position, and to prevent the interviewer from simply pursuing the questions they find most interesting; (b) standardise interview behaviour by asking the same questions in the same manner for all potential employees, whilst recording all responses; (c) use the limited interview time to obtain as much information as possible about the candidate's life in their environment; d) do not make decisions primarily based on the interviewers' evaluations; e) establish a standard protocol for scoring interview responses that includes summary measures that have been recognised as predictive job performance success criteria; and f) recruiters must understand and be aware of their knowledge limitations (Batista, 2021) and that selection decisions are subject to error (Highhouse, 2008).

Although structured interviews have advantages, some challenges must be overcome. Identifying the characteristics that are required for success, developing a set of questions that will consistently elicit evidence of those characteristics, and calibrating scores between responses, can all be very difficult tasks. Even so, making the effort will assist an organisation in better understanding its interviewing strategy, identifying any biases, and developing a more impartial process. Making the interview process more structured will increase the likelihood of positive potential employee selection decisions (Batista, 2021).

Staats (2014) suggests the following steps to improve the efficacy of interviews: 1) specific training for interviewers; 2) using structured procedures for rating the candidates; 3) the presence of multiple interviewers, and 4) filming the actual interview. Furthermore, Staats (2014) and Kristof-Brown, Barrick and Franke (2002) caution recruiters against first impressions, preliminary thought, or gut responses in the interview selection stage. It is necessary to ensure that selection is a deliberative process that allows for time and reflection.

According to Alder and Gilbert (2006), interviews should be based on objective principles that are free from bias and preferential treatment, and the interview processes and techniques should be transparent and straightforward. Another mitigating strategy to minimise the effects of unconscious bias in the interview process is to use a scorecard to evaluate applicants, based on pre-determined criteria (Blackman, 2017; Schatz, 2021). Schatz (2021:27) states that a scorecard makes the selection more comparable across applicants and ensures that all the “information presented by the applicant will be written down and taken into consideration”. This reduces the risk of “neglecting information that is inconsistent with stereotypic expectations” (Schatz, 2012:27), while also minimising the effect of unconscious bias.

Essentially, organisations need to develop an awareness of potential biases in methods and processes used in selecting potential employees. This can be done by stressing the advantages of a diverse workforce; holding recruiters (and managers) responsible for their recruitment decisions; stressing the need for diversity measures, such as quotas (referred to in Chapter 2, 2.4.1) to overcome previous biases; and

adopting intentional measures aimed at ensuring diversity and inclusion (Tetlock & Mitchel, 2009).

In order to mitigate the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity and/or inclusion, various strategies must be implemented in order to create a diverse workforce that are committed to deliberate acts to ensure diversity and inclusion. Although many organisations have gone to great lengths to increase diversity and create inclusive work environments, many have been dissatisfied with the results of their efforts to promote diversity (Pless & Maak, 2004; Pless, Maak & Harris, 2017). An organisation's underlying motives regarding diversity is important, since the incentive for practicing diversity will influence organisational outcomes. If an organisation's primary goal is to meet a diversity target, such as a certain percentage of women in senior leadership roles, they can expect to meet the target (at least in the short term), but they are unlikely to realise the performance benefits of diversity. This is due to the fact that targets do nothing to address underlying attitudes and beliefs (Whysall, 2020). According to Pless and Maak (2004:131), there is a need for organisations to consciously review the ethical underpinnings of their diversity strategies, to create truly diverse organisations:

> Coping with diversity on a normative level means exactly this: recognising difference while looking for the common bond. The more conscious the treatment of the ethical underpinnings is, the better are the chances that the essential ethical needs of those involved are met and, at the same time, inclusiveness is enhanced to a degree where the many advantages become visible and liveable, in a culture of inclusion.

Organisations need to examine all their diversity practices and processes, as well as the ethical underpinnings of their organisational strategies. Apfelbaum, Stephens and Reagans (2016:17) advocate that there is not one approach to diversity, and “one size does not fit all”. In other words, organisations face practical challenges due to multiple groups who have different concerns, thus reflecting the complexity of diversity in contemporary organisations. For instance, the current diversity focus appears to be on minority groups – in isolation, thus excluding majority groups in the

wider organisational context. Considering and accounting for both minority and majority groups is critical in developing an inclusive organisational culture highlighting the need to be inclusive when considering both majority and minority groups' attitudes towards and reactions to diversity when implementing diversity initiatives. Whilst there is no single best way to maximise the benefits of diversity initiatives; it will depend, in particular, on how individuals and groups within an organisation respond to differences. Diversity initiatives and recruitment practices that aim to increase opportunities among minority groups must be accompanied by efforts to address concerns about perceived ethics throughout the organisation (Whysall, 2020).

As argued in this chapter, the guidance provided by the ethics of complexity approach – and particularly the provisional imperative – is deemed to be relevant in considering how risks to organisational diversity can be mitigated. No doubt few organisational leaders are acquainted with business ethics from a philosophical and theoretical point of view, but this provides an opportunity for philosophers and academia to cross the boundary to the business world, bringing the knowledge and wisdom of applied business ethics to organisations in a practical way. In partnership, new possibilities can then be found through provisionality and imagination.

## Summary

This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of practical steps that can be taken to mitigate the risks of discrimination and a lack of organisational diversity. The mechanisms of provisionality and imagination underlying the provisional imperative indicate how the ethics of complexity could assist in mitigating these risks. It was argued that there is a need to rethink the use of PO-fit in selection decisions. This would entail firstly reflecting on the meaning of PO-fit, and secondly, understanding and reflecting on the impact of the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit in selection decisions.

The concept of PO-add was introduced as a possible supplement to the PO-fit approach. PO-add implies a shift from seeking similarity between employees' culture and organisational culture, ensuring that employees add their uniqueness to the

organisation, thereby increasing diversity and fostering a culture within which diversity and inclusion are valued. The need for organisational culture analysis was argued since PO-fit is inextricably linked to organisational culture. Therefore, a deep understanding of organisational culture and the complexities and dynamics thereof is necessary to mitigate the risks associated with using PO-fit in selection decisions.

Cross-cultural coaching was presented as a further mitigation strategy, emphasizing the need for system-wide coaching to ensure that systemic change is achieved. It was further argued that the first step in terms of mitigating the risk of unconscious bias is to make the unconscious, conscious. A practical way of assisting in this was suggested, namely the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) as a training tool in diversity programmes. This would enable employees to recognise bias and to understand how their own biases might affect their behaviour and impact others.

Various ways in which groupthink could be minimised were presented, followed by strategies that pertain specifically to selection and interview processes. Also it was argued that organisations need to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of their organisational diversity strategies. Practical application of the provisional imperative and its associated mechanisms was suggested as a possible way in which the business environment on the one hand, and philosophers and academia, on the other hand, can come together to co-create real and sustainable change in terms of diversity and inclusion in organisations.

# CONCLUSION

Despite an emphasis on the importance of diversity in an organisational context, many organisations fail to successfully implement diversity strategies. The aim of this theoretical study, based on a review of the existing literature, was to arrive at a deeper understanding of why diversity strategies fail. Three concepts were identified during the preliminary literature review as possibly contributing to the lack of success of organisational diversity strategies: organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit.

The following research questions pertaining to the three key concepts guided the study:

- What is the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of HRM (Human Resource Management) and employee selection decisions?
- What are the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of employee selection decisions?
- How can these ethical risks be mitigated?

These concepts were considered through the lens of complexity thinking (Woermann & Cilliers, 2012). Organisations were defined as complex systems within which there are dynamic and reflexive interrelations between parts of the system, giving rise to emergent phenomena (such as organisational culture) in a non-linear way. It was argued that the reflexive and non-linear nature of organisational dynamics means that predictive outcomes of interrelations cannot be established and, therefore, the reflexive and non-linear interplay of the parts, rather than the parts themselves was the object of inquiry. The intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit is therefore the focus of this study.

The first research question (What is the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of HRM and employee selection decisions?) was dealt with in Chapter 1. It was argued that the imbrication of organisational culture and PO-fit is embedded in the definition of PO-fit: candidates

must fit the culture and share the values of the organisation. When PO-fit is applied in selection decisions, the existing organisational culture is perpetuated. Unconscious bias – meaning social stereotyping based upon attitudes, beliefs or norms – affects decision-making and can lead to biased outcomes. The challenging relationship between unconscious bias and organisational culture means that employees and the organisation continually influence organisational culture. Organisational culture, as an emergent characteristic, comes into being through conscious and unconscious aspects created by employees' habits, beliefs, values, ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting. The influence of unconscious bias manifests in organisational culture as abstractions of these unconscious values and beliefs. It was argued that unconscious bias, through the workings of PO-fit, problematically influences employee recruitment selection decisions, thus leading to ethical risks.

These ethical risks were discussed in Chapter 2 which deals with the second research question (What are the ethical risks arising at the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias, and PO-fit in the context of employee selection decisions?) Firstly, discrimination was identified as an ethical risk resulting from using PO-fit in selection decisions. Secondly, it was argued that discrimination against the individual could lead to systemic discrimination due to the aggregating effect within a complex system. This aggregating effect was identified as a lack of organisational diversity, thus influencing organisational culture, and causing harm to those individuals who are discriminated against. Furthermore, groupthink – as a process of collective rationalisation characterised by in-group preference and out-group bias – affects decision-making and is often the product of systemic unconscious bias, contributing to the ethical risks of discrimination and perpetuating a lack of diversity.

The motivation behind organisational diversity strategies was considered from three ethical perspectives: utilitarian, deontological, and the ethics of complexity. It was argued that the utilitarian and deontological approaches to ethics are insufficient in dealing with the complexities highlighted in this study. In particular, a utilitarian approach to organisational diversity could be one of the reasons why so many diversity initiatives in organisations fail, as it does not foster a truly inclusive

organisational culture. A deontological approach to organisational diversity strategies could translate into more successful diversity initiatives than a utilitarian approach, although it lacks in one very important area, namely, it does not take complexity into account. Based on this argument, a third perspective was considered, namely the ethics of complexity – a theory that provides guidance when ethical decision-making is the objective. The ethics of complexity requires a very specific position from decision-makers, namely, the provisional imperative. Two of the supporting mechanisms of the provisional imperative were discussed, namely provisionality and imagination.

It is necessary to recognise the provisionality of our decisions and the fact that they are based on incomplete and/or partial knowledge. When provisionality is acknowledged, ethics is viewed as a tentative and provisional concept that requires deconstruction and reconsideration. When the aim is to make ethical decisions, provisionality necessitates that the decision-maker first acknowledge that the knowledge they use is tentative and provisional and decisions are contextually contingent, are temporary and should be subject to reconsideration and revision.

In a setting of an unknowable, unpredictable future, imagination might be understood as a creative leap. Imagination plays a crucial role in engaging with diversity by generating a variety of possibilities that are not constrained by closed conceptual circles and schema. Imagination implies being able to diversify outside of one's narrow or limited interpretations and to be aware of other rules and other ways of being. The provisional imperative requires taking cognisance of and engaging with options and ways of being that might not otherwise be considered within the confines of our knowledge systems.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to answering the third research question (How can the ethical risks of discrimination and a lack of diversity be mitigated?). Various practical strategies were presented in response to this question, with specific reference to the ethics of complexity and the mechanisms of provisionality and imagination which support the provisional imperative. Rethinking the use of PO-fit in selection decisions was presented as a critical requirement to mitigate the identified ethical risks. Rethinking PO-fit entails reflecting on the meaning of PO-fit and understanding the

impact of the intersection of organisational culture, unconscious bias and PO-fit in selection decisions.

The concept of PO-add was introduced as a possible addition to the PO-fit approach. PO-add implies a shift from ensuring similarity between employees' culture and organisational culture, to ensuring that employees add their uniqueness to the organisation, thereby increasing diversity and fostering a culture within which diversity and inclusion are valued. Based on the inextricable link between PO-fit and organisational culture, it was argued that organisations need to develop a deep understanding of organisational culture and the complexities and dynamics thereof. System-wide, cross-cultural coaching was presented as a further mitigation strategy to ensure that systemic change is achieved. The complexity of working with unconscious bias was highlighted – and the need to make the unconscious conscious was suggested, through the practical application of the Implicit Association Test (IAT). This test enables employees to recognise biases and to understand how their own biases might affect their behaviour and impact others. Various strategies that pertain specifically to selection processes were presented, followed by a discussion on how groupthink could be minimised.

The practical application of the provisional imperative and associated mechanisms was suggested as a potential way in which the business environment, on the one hand – and academia and philosophers, on the other – can come together to co-create real and sustainable change in terms of diversity and inclusion in organisations. Finally, the thesis argues that organisations need to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of their organisational diversity strategies.

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